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The Life, Death and Rebirth of University Avenue: Exploring the Relationship Among Transportation, Urban Form and Neighborhood Characteristics

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**THE LIFE, DEATH AND REBIRTH OF UNIVERSITY
AVENUE:
EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG TRANSPORTATION,
URBAN FORM AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS**

Jill Goforth
May 2011

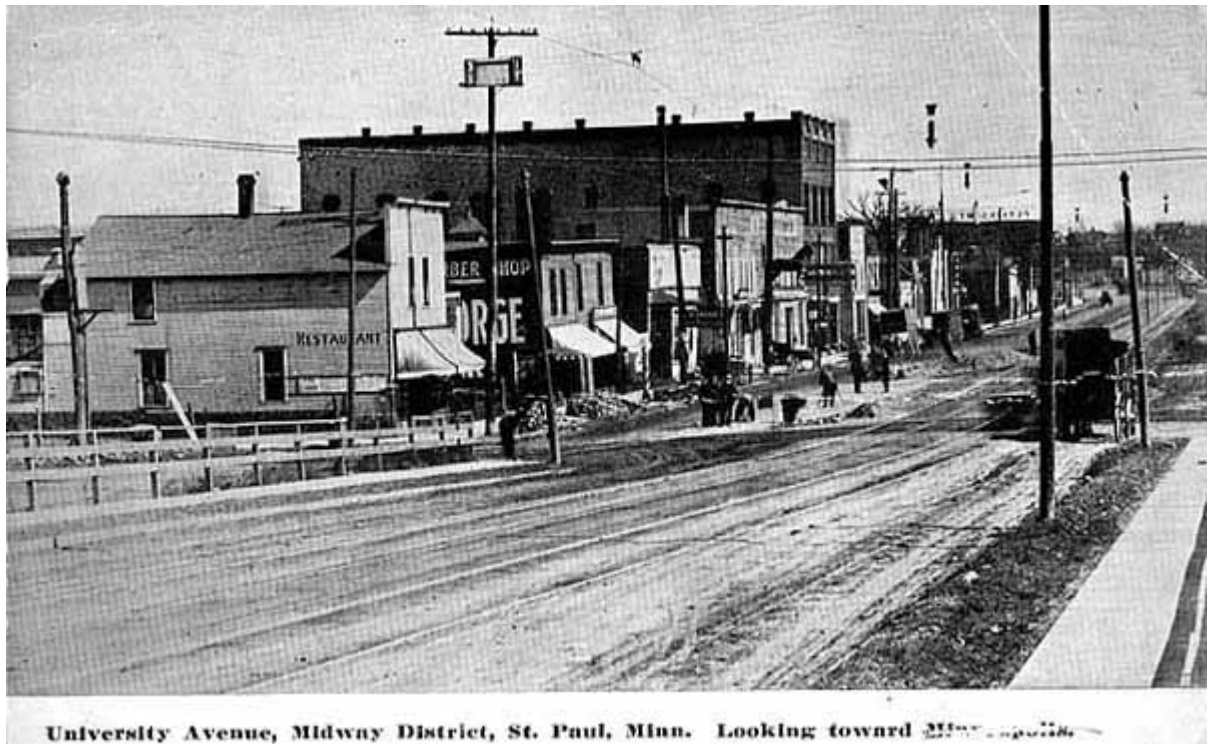
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“... [The ‘Mississippi City’] shall rise in its beauty on the ancient site of St. Paul and Minneapolis, with 200,000 inhabitants bound together by this picturesque highway, this [splendid] artery, this gorgeous ligament, this bond of union and the assurance of commercial thrift.”¹

¹ Aron Kahn , “Moe plans University Avenue renaissance,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 14 February 1982, M1.

ABSTRACT

The impending light rail transit development along University Avenue in Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Minnesota has led to local curiosity about both the past activities and the future possibilities for this urban street. Part I of this paper explores the social, economic and physical evolution of University Avenue and its relationship to transportation eras. Part II argues that there is a connection between the urban form of each transportation epoch and the rate of crime along University Avenue. The study concludes with the prediction that safety will improve following construction of the Central Corridor Light Rail line.



University Avenue looking southeast from a viaduct over the Minnesota Transfer Track, 1912. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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INTRODUCTION

University Avenue in Saint Paul-Minneapolis, Minnesota represents one of the most historically significant transportation corridors in the Twin Cities; the street connects downtown Minneapolis with downtown Saint Paul and is anchored by the University of Minnesota on its west end and the State Capitol on its east end. Indeed, the street's situation between two major metropolitan areas has played an important role in the way in which it has developed. Each transportation innovation and shift in mobility preferences has had a major influence on the activities of the street. During its heyday, University was home to the Minnesota Transfer Railroad Yards, the Snelling Streetcar Shops, and the Interurban Streetcar Line, making it one of the busiest and most prosperous avenues in the Twin Cities. However, suburbanization and the construction of Interstate 94 caused the street to lose its luster, and for several decades it was neglected and uncared for. Today, University is entering another major era of transformation and development; in 2014, it will see the completion of the Central Corridor light rail line. The project will no doubt have an effect on the surrounding University Avenue community; however, the exact impact of the rail line is unclear.

In light of this exciting future transformation of University, many have become curious as to the future possibilities for the avenue. Advocates of the Central Corridor suggest that the light rail line will reduce traffic congestion, provide better access to jobs and education, increase the visibility of already existing businesses, improve air quality, create sustained growth for the Midway business district and improve the overall

livability and safety of the surrounding neighborhood.² This paper explores the final claim- that the corridor will become safer as a result of this major transportation and development project.

A key component of the Central Corridor project is that it is not just about moving people. In fact, taking forty minutes each way, the light rail will not be the fastest way to get from one city center to another. Instead, city leaders see the light rail as a chance for economic development and neighborhood revitalization.³ This shift in transportation priorities is part of a new movement of urban planning and design called transit-oriented development (TOD). According to the literature, TOD projects contribute to improved neighborhood livability by incorporating high-density, mixed-use development within walking distance of transit stations.⁴ Additionally, TOD projects incorporate mixed housing choices, create a sense of place and provide human-scaled development.

A key claim of TOD is that manipulation of the built environment will lead to improved safety of its surrounding areas. Prominent individuals in the fields of urban planning, including Jane Jacobs, support this assertion. In fact, Jacobs realized the important relationship between the built environment and individual behavior several decades before transit-oriented development came onto the scene. First published in 1961, her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, critiques the modernist planning policies of the 1950s and 1960s, and claims that the policies were destroying many inner-city neighborhoods. Though it took several decades for cities to embrace the

² Ramsey County Regional Rail, "Project Background," *Central Corridor*, <http://www.regionalrail.org/central.html> (June 2010).

³ Chris Havens, "Central Corridor isn't just about moving people," *Star Tribune*, <http://www.startribune.com/local/stpaul/87598407.html?page=3&c=y> (March 13, 2010).

⁴ Center for Transit Oriented Development, "Welcome," <http://ctod.org/portal/> (Accessed April 2011).

ideas of Jacobs, today, cities all over the country are incorporating her theories into their city development plans, including the Twin Cities. The purpose of this study is to test the claims of transit-oriented development advocates and explore how this popular form of urban design will affect University Avenue.

The paper is divided into three parts. Part I begins with an introduction to a well-known theory of transportation and urban form that suggests that each transportation era corresponds with a specific pattern of development and social structure within the urban metropolis. University Avenue is then introduced, first with an overview of its demographic trends over time, and second, its historical progression will be described in relation to transportation eras. The goal of Part I is to familiarize the reader with the social, economic and physical transformation of University throughout time and to make connections between eras of transportation and the form of the built environment. Furthermore, knowledge of previous trends of development and transformation along the avenue will allow for informed speculation of what the future holds for this urban street.

Part II expands upon the connections made in Part I; it argues that the urban form created by transportation characteristics has the ability to affect crime rates. The section begins with a review of various theories that both support and contextualize this assertion and then provides a case study of the historical progression of crime along the avenue. The study uses quantitative data to map crime along University, and finds that crime has increased over time, particularly in areas that are dominated by an automobile-oriented design scheme.

Part III concludes with a final suggestion as to what is likely to happen along University Avenue as a result of light rail transit. Given my results, I will argue that if the City follows through with its current plans, University Avenue should see an improvement in safety in the years that follow the completion of the Central Corridor light rail plan.

PART I:
THE LIFE, DEATH AND REBIRTH OF UNIVERSITY AVENUE

CHAPTER I

THEORY REVIEW

Introduction

The fact that the transportation system has had an enormous effect on urban form is a widely held conviction. As an example of this conviction, Muller (2004)⁵ organizes his discussion of urban structure in terms of the transportation eras first identified by Adams (1970)⁶. According to the theory, each transportation epoch corresponds with a specific pattern of development and social structure within the urban metropolis. The stages are the Walking/Horsecar Era (1800-1890), the Electric Streetcar Era (1890-1920), the Recreational Automobile Era (1920-1945), and the Freeway Era (1945-present).

Upon exploring University Avenue's past in depth, it becomes clear that its historical progression fits into the particular transportation eras described by Muller. The following is a review of the transportation eras and their influence on the urban form and social structure of the American metropolis in general. The discussion will contextualize my later discussion on the evolution of University Avenue specifically.

The Walking Horsecar Era

Prior to 1850, the dominant means of getting about the American city was by foot. This constraint on mobility required people and activities to tightly cluster in close proximity to one another. A commute from the center of the city to any given point within the urban metropolis was rarely more than a 30-minute walk. During this time,

⁵ Peter O. Muller, "Transportation and Urban Form: Stages in the Spatial Evolution of the American Metropolis," in *The Geography of Urban Transportation: Third Edition*, eds. Susan Hanson and Genevieve Giuliano (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004).

⁶ J.S. Adams, "Residential Structure of Midwestern cities," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 60, 37-62.

those with money often took advantage of horse-and-carriage transportation to escape the noisy and polluted central city for the nearby countryside, and the population began to sort itself by income.

Soon, industrialization caused the city to become over-crowded, and the central city began to physically deteriorate. This created desire among the middle class to follow the wealthy to the countryside. When the horse-drawn trolley emerged onto the scene in 1852, the middle-class was finally able to fulfill their desires, for the horsecars allowed for residential construction at the city's edge. Unable to afford the fare and the time associated with this mode of transportation, the urban poor remained confined to the core.

The Electric Streetcar Era

The invention of the electric traction motor launched the American metropolis into a new era of mobility. The streetcars that this electric motor enabled traveled at triple the speed of a horsecar and therefore allowed for swift development of the urban fringe. However, because the routes were fixed, individuals did not have complete freedom of movement within the city. People and businesses therefore concentrated around the streetcar lines, and a star-shaped pattern of development emerged. In general, the quality of housing and prosperity of streetcar neighborhoods increased with distance from the center of the city and were populated by the emerging middle class.

Because the fare of the electric streetcar was relatively low, the majority of the urban population had access to the system. This created fewer mobility constraints and allowed for businesses and other activities to sort according to specialization. The social structure of the city was transformed during this period as well. The accessibility of the streetcars gave the lower class the opportunity to arrange themselves into their respective

ethnic groups rather than reside in the heterogeneous mix of housing that surrounded the factories in which they worked.

The Recreational Automobile Era

As the automobile was introduced onto the scene, the shape of the city was gradually transformed. The first private automobiles came about in the early 1900s, and were initially used purely for the amusements of the wealthy, hence the *Recreational Automobile Era*. The car allowed for areas that had previously been underserved by the streetcar lines to be developed, and decentralization of the population intensified. The emergence of the automobile removed most mobility constraints, and the population further sorted themselves into varying income groups. This was especially aided by various economic practices of homeownership that particularly benefited the middle class. Of course, many non-residential activities suburbanized as well, in order to better serve their target clientele.

The Freeway Era

The Freeway Era came about as a result of the proliferation of automobile culture. Virtually overnight, the private automobile went from being a convenience for the wealthy to a necessity for all. The emergence of the nation from depression and war, as well as the invention of the assembly line that dramatically decreased prices of the car, caused an automobile buying frenzy that completely changed the form of the metropolis. As more Americans purchased cars and as congestion worsened, the country recognized the need for a transportation network that would better accommodate the automobile. Thus, the Interstate Highway Act of 1956 was established, and a nationwide freeway system was built that enabled the incredible sprawl of the American city.

The freeway network dramatically reduced commuting times, and people therefore no longer needed to reside in close proximity to where they worked. One could now live in the best possible residence he/she could afford anywhere in the city, and thus, the separation of the classes was further magnified.

The Light Rail Transit Era

Muller ends his discussion of the evolution of urban transportation with the era of the freeway; however, I argue that the urban metropolis is transforming itself once again. Planners, policy-makers, public stakeholders, academicians and residents are beginning to realize the various negative effects that our automobile culture has created. Cars and the built environment they create have been linked to environmental degradation, health issues, and a decline in the safety of our city neighborhoods, among other issues. Many cities have therefore decided to make a move back to rail, this time in the form of light rail transit.

Unlike the goals of the transportation network created for the private automobile, this newest form of transportation does not focus on moving people. It emphasizes manipulation of the built environment of entire corridors in order to encourage walking, cycling, and utilization of public transit, which is believed to have the potential to reduce traffic congestion and pollution, discourage sprawl, increase the visibility of urban businesses, provide better access to jobs and education, and improve the overall livability and safety of our city neighborhoods.

CHAPTER II

SETTING THE SCENE: DEMOGRAPHICS OF UNIVERSITY AVENUE

Introduction

Like many urban streets, University Avenue has experienced periods of prosperity, disinvestment and revitalization. This section explores the avenue's history in terms of neighborhood demographics, and compares the trends of University Avenue with that of Ramsey County. The trends reveal that, even when it was thriving, University was not more prosperous than Ramsey County at-large. Furthermore, University has always suffered from greater unemployment, lower incomes, and declining home values. Finally, the trends show that the avenue has been much more racially diverse than Ramsey County as a whole, and continues to be so today.

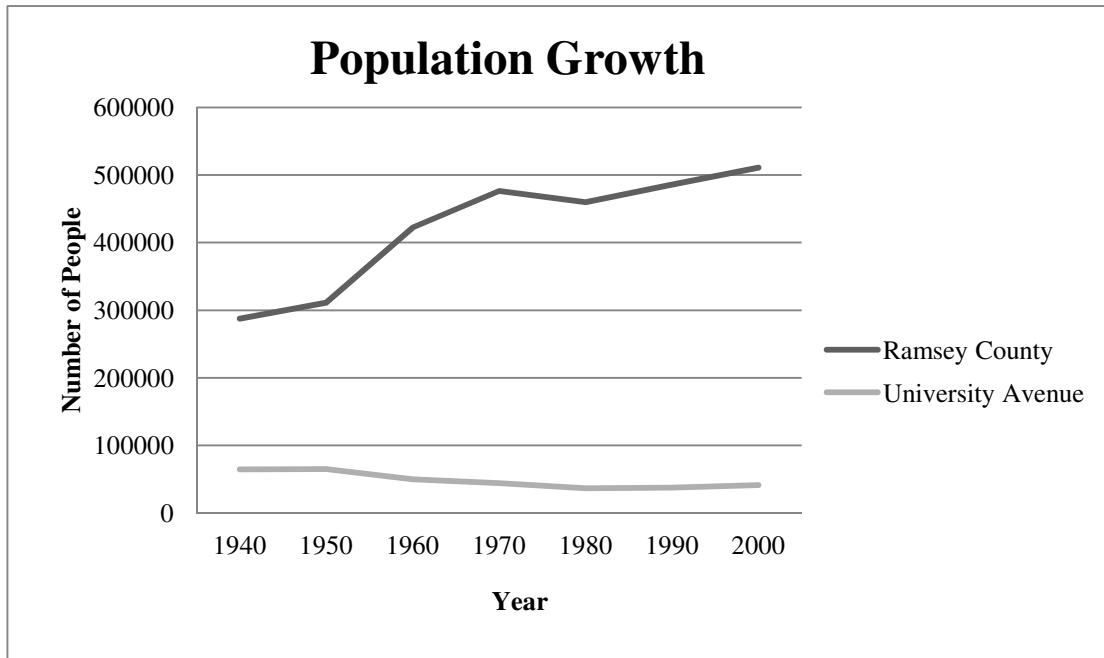
The following demographic data were collected from the National Historical Geographic Information System created by the Minnesota Population Center at the University of Minnesota.⁷ Data have been collected at the census tract level for both Ramsey County and University Avenue.⁸ Census tracts typically have between 2,500 and 8,000 persons and are designed to be homogenous in terms of population characteristics, economic status and living conditions.⁹ Those tracts that touch the edges of University are used to define the avenue. Due to availability constraints, the demographic variables included are limited to population, race, unemployment, median income and median housing value. Furthermore, the range of dates for which data are available differs amongst the various demographic data.

⁷ Minnesota Population Center. *National Historical Geographic Information System: Pre-release Version 0.1*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota 2004.

⁸ For a reference map of St. Paul census tracts, see the Appendix.

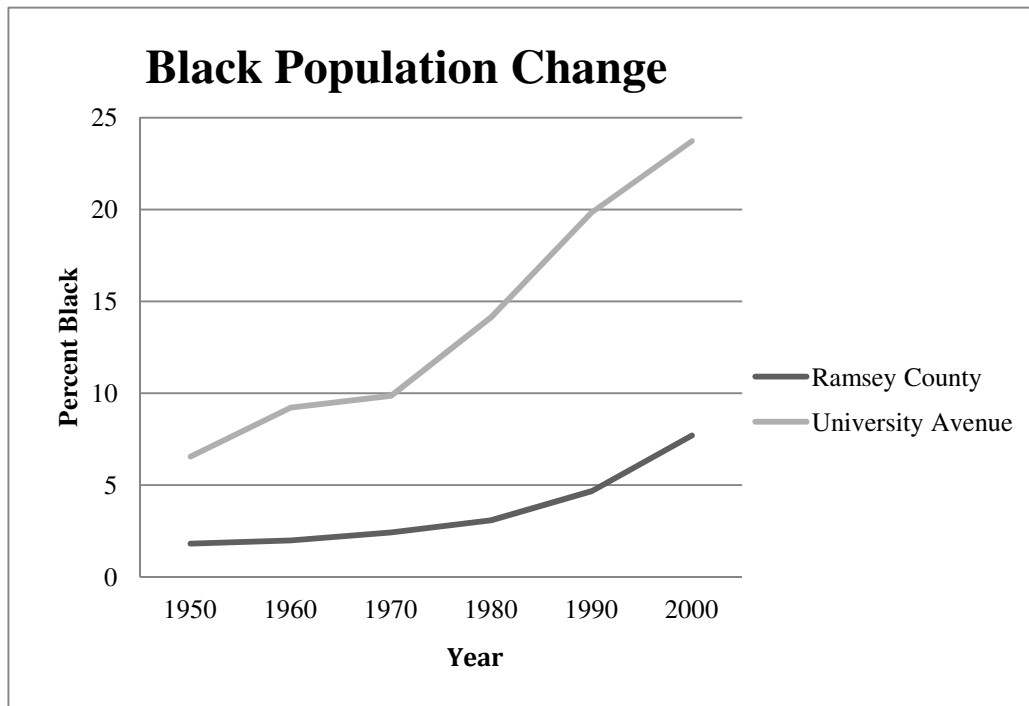
⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, "Census Tracts and Block Numbering Areas," http://www.census.gov/geo/www/cen_tract.html (April 2000).

Population

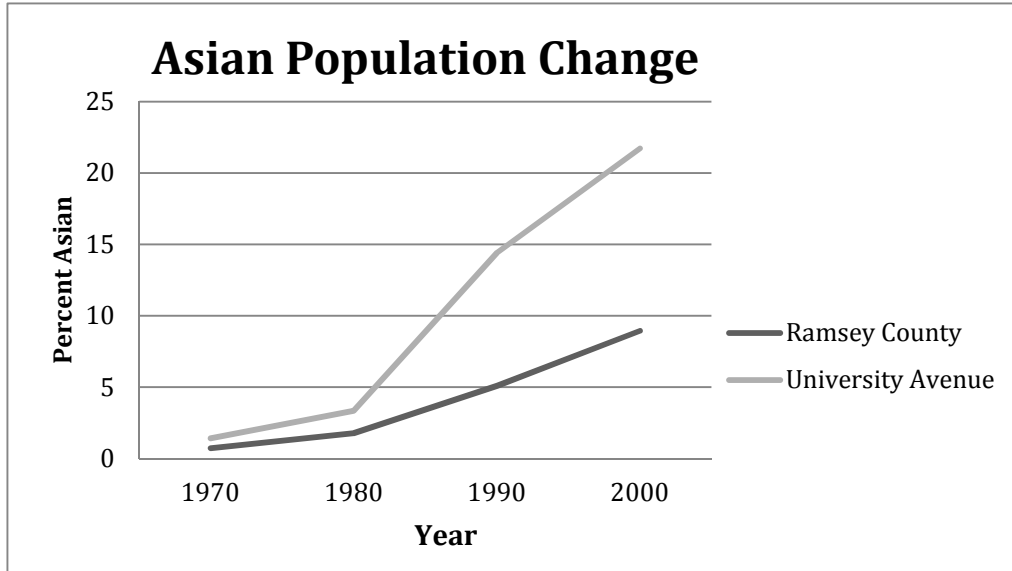


The number of people living along University Avenue has gradually declined over time. In the 1940s and 1950s, University Avenue claimed over 20 percent of the Ramsey County population, but by 1960, it only represented 11 percent of the county's population. By the year 2000, only 8 percent of the population of Ramsey County lived along University Avenue. In terms of actual numbers, the avenue had its largest population in 1950 with a count of 65,209 people. From 1950 to 1960 the avenue lost 15,350 people and continued to lose even more through the 1980s. In recent years, University has seen a slight increase in population. The population went from 37,512 people in 1990 to 41,309 people in 2000.

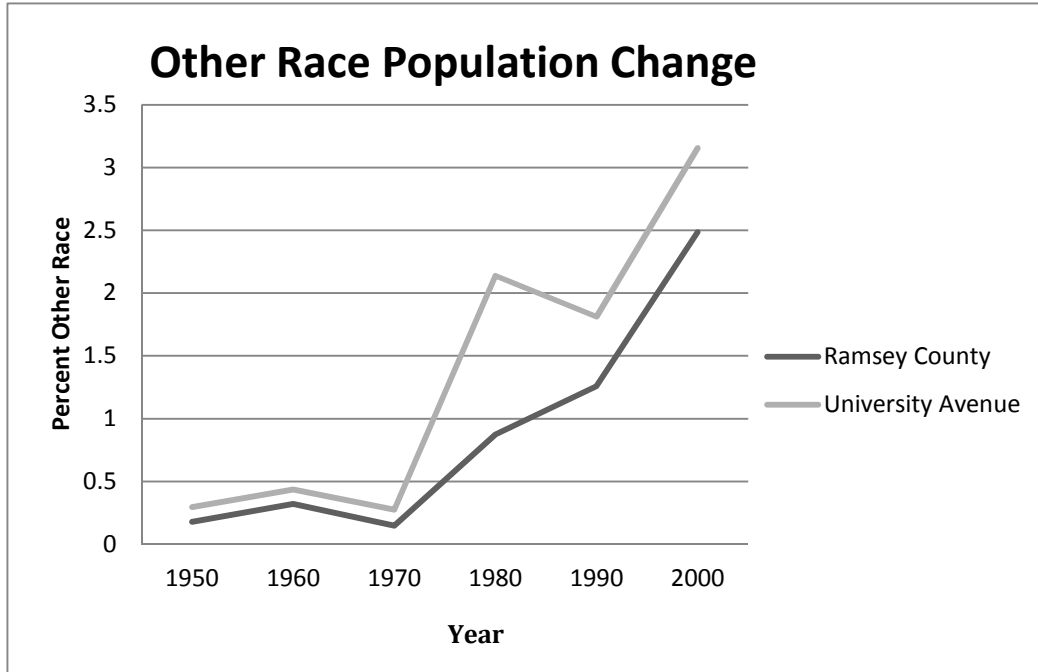
Race



University Avenue has always had a higher concentration of black individuals than Ramsey County at--large. The avenue experienced huge spikes in the black population from 1950 (6.6%) to 1960 (9.2%), and again from 1970 (9.9%) to 1980 (14.1%). The black community continued to grow at a fast rate after 1980.

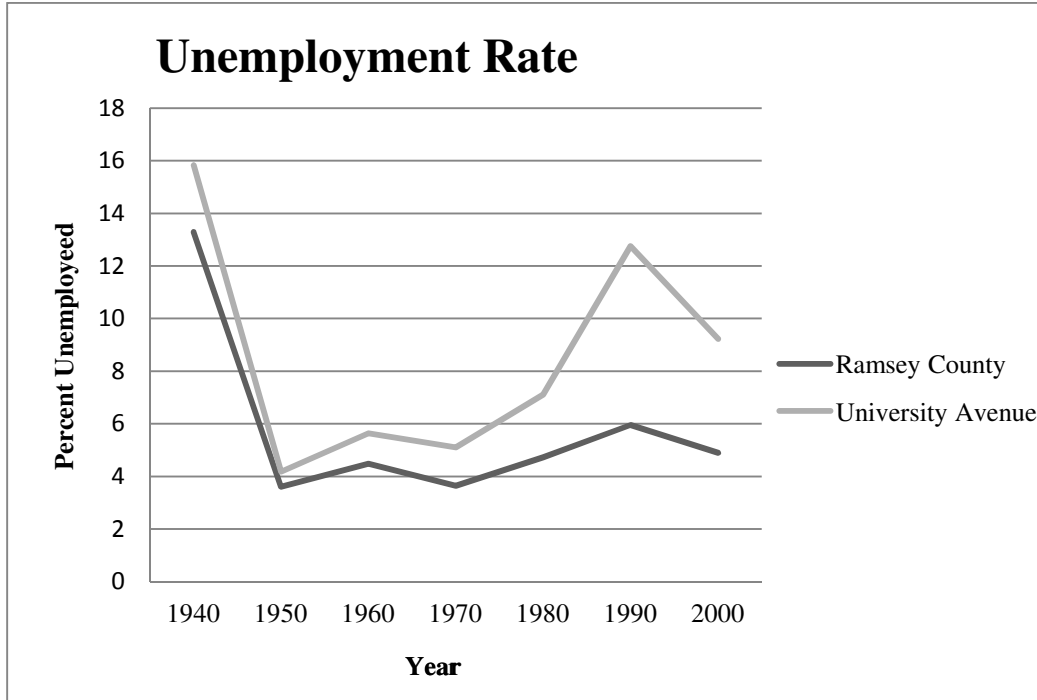


Since 1970, the Asian population has been greater along University Avenue than in Ramsey County as a whole. The avenue experienced its greatest influx of Asian immigrants from 1980 to 1990, increasing from 3.3 percent to 14.4 percent. The Asian population has continued to grow rapidly; in 1990 14.4 percent of the population was listed as Asian, and by 2000, 21.7 percent of the population identified as Asian.



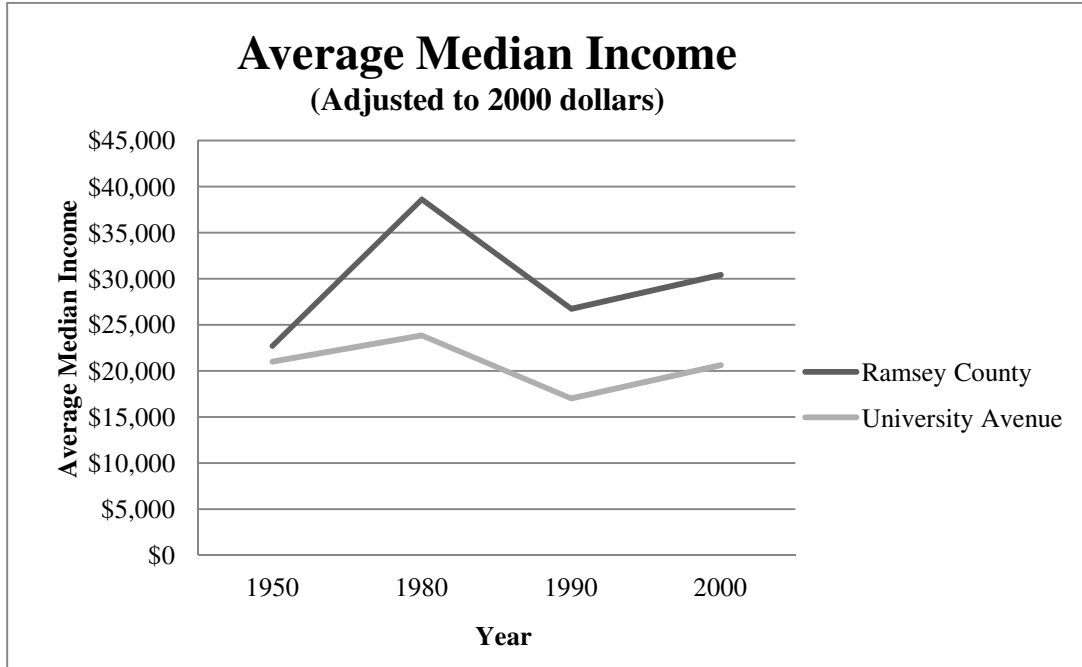
The prevalence of other races in Ramsey County and along University Avenue follows a similar pattern; however, University Avenue has a higher percentage of other races throughout time. The avenue experienced a decline in the percent of other races from 1960 to 1970, falling from 0.44 percent to 0.28 percent. University then experienced a huge spike in the prevalence of other races from 1970 to 1980, increasing to 2.4 percent. Though the rate fell 1.8 percent from 1980 to 1990, it grew to 3.15 percent in 2000.

Unemployment



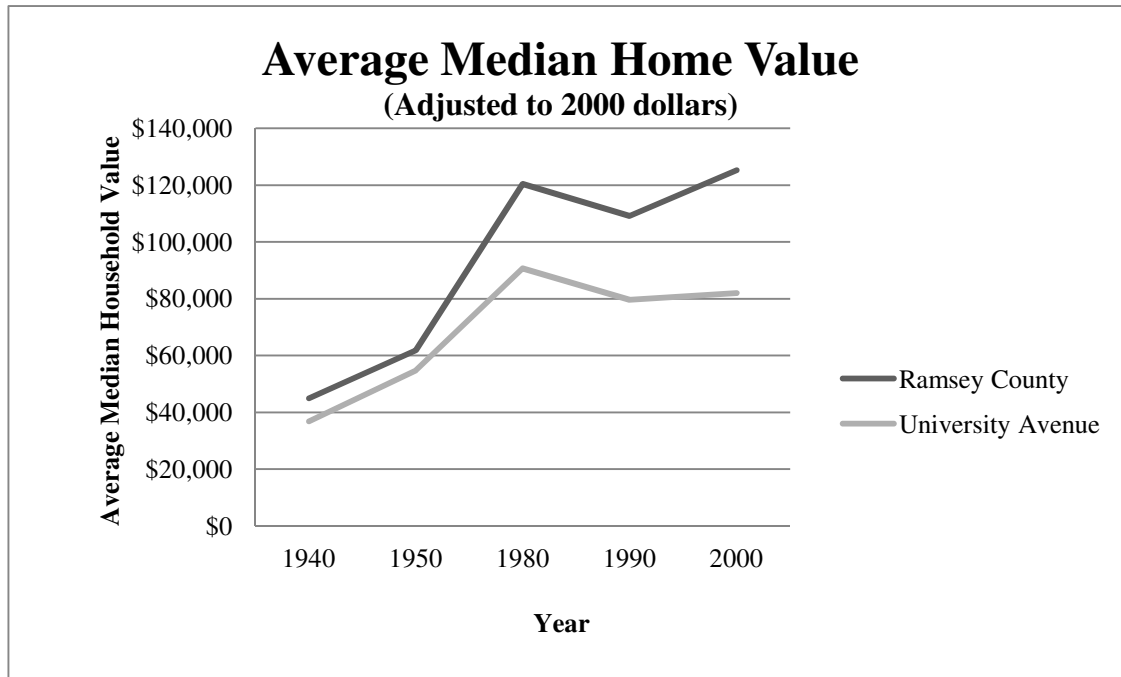
The unemployment rate along University Avenue follows the same patterns of highs and lows of Ramsey County; however, its rate of unemployment is consistently higher than the county's over time. Unemployment along University hit its peak during the Great Depression; in 1940, 15.83 percent of the population was out of work. The avenue was hit hard again in 1990 due to an economic recession that was affecting much of the world. However, unemployment along University was especially high, with an unemployment rate of 12.75 percent compared to Ramsey County's rate of 5.96 percent.

Median Income



Similar to the unemployment rate, average median income along University follows a similar pattern as Ramsey County. However, there is a wide gap between the average median income of Ramsey County and the average median income of University Avenue. The gap was smallest in 1950 with a difference of \$1,702; residents of University Avenue were making eight percent less, on average, than the population of Ramsey County at-large. By 1980, the gap became significantly wider; residents of University were making about forty percent less than the average Ramsey County resident at this time. In recent years, the median income of the avenue has improved slightly. In 2000, the median income was about 33 percent less than the median income of Ramsey County at-large.

Median House Value



Average median housing value along University Avenue follows the pattern of Ramsey County; however, home values along University are lower than in Ramsey County in every year. Median housing value peaked in 1980, fell from 1980 to 1990 and has since leveled off. In comparison to Ramsey County, home values of University Avenue have been gradually declining over time. In 1940, the average home in Ramsey County cost around \$45,000 and the average home along University Avenue cost about \$37,000.¹⁰ This translates to about a 20 percent difference in the home values along University compared with the home values in Ramsey County at-large. By 2000, homes along University cost about 35 percent less than the average home in Ramsey County; the average home value along University was \$81,975 and the average home value in Ramsey County was \$125,313.

¹⁰ These numbers have been adjusted to 2000 dollars.

Conclusion

The demographic trends of University reveal that historically, the avenue has been more racially diverse than Ramsey County at-large and that it has struggled with high unemployment rates, low incomes and a poor housing stock throughout the years. Furthermore, it is apparent that the economic health of the avenue has become worse over time. This section has sought to understand University Avenue within the broader context of Ramsey County. The social and economic trends of the street, as well as their relationship to transportation eras, will be explored in depth in the following sections.

CHAPTER III

THE WALKING-HORSECAR ERA: UNIVERSITY AVENUE IS BORN

University Avenue was first platted in 1857 in response to a growing St. Paul workforce that began settling in the surrounding neighborhoods. In those years, the street was dubbed Melrose Avenue; the original University Avenue was located on a stretch of land several blocks north of its current location, where it connected Hamline University in St. Paul to the University of Minnesota.¹¹

Twenty-six years later, in 1883, the Minnesota Transfer Railway Company, a Minnesota corporation, was incorporated under the impetus of James J. Hill,¹² who felt a need for a centralized terminal and transfer network to serve the nine major railway lines entering Minneapolis and Saint Paul.¹³ Because its location blocked the road connecting the two Universities, the eastern portion of University had to be shifted one half mile south to its current location. University Avenue appropriated the name of what had been Melrose Avenue, and the original University Avenue became part of Minnehaha Avenue.¹⁴

The repositioning of the street and the establishment of the Minnesota Transfer Yards near the current intersection of Prior and University Avenues marked the beginning of an era of greatness for the street. The transfer yards were largely responsible for the early industrial development of University, for it was “the great

¹¹ Donald L. Empson, *The Street Where You Live: A Guide to the Place Names of St. Paul* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 274.

¹² James J. Hill was a prominent railroad tycoon who lived in St. Paul for most of his life. He was known as the “Empire Builder” because of the size of the region and the economic dominance exerted by his lines.

¹³ Jane McClure, “The Midway Chamber and Its Community: The Colorful History of an ‘Unparalleled Feature,’” *Ramsey County History* v. 29:3 (Ramsey County Historical Society, 1994), 5.

¹⁴ Empson 274.

clearing house for all of the west bound and east bound freight that passed. Every train going into the city rolled into the Minnesota Transfer Yard.” By 1912, the company had “eighty-two miles of track, 400 switches, nineteen locomotives, 1,000 employees and an average payroll of about \$60,000 per month. About 1,500 cars arrived daily.”¹⁵

Working-class residents of the avenue recall laboring in factories that provided goods for residents of the Northwestern United States, including mattresses, beds, chairs, tables, pianos, furnaces and farm equipment.¹⁶ Industry led to retail and soon, University Avenue was a bustling thoroughfare spanning the two quickly growing cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis.



Minnesota Transfer Yards, St. Paul. Photo by the Northwestern Photographic Studio, Inc.; courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

It did not take long for city leaders to realize the great potential of University Avenue as a link between the growing Twin Cities. On February 14, 1873, members of

¹⁵ McClure 5.

¹⁶ McClure 6.

the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce and the Minneapolis Board of Trade met and approved a plan for a “Broad Avenue” designed to “unite the two cities in commerce, trade and transportation.” The plan called for the creation of a wide thoroughfare on a direct line between the two cities, 660 feet wide, with passenger rail running down the center. The railway was to be bounded by 200-foot wide linear parks, 100-foot wide boulevards on each side, and attractions such as the State Fair, gardens, and works of art along its route.¹⁷ One St. Paul leader boldly suggested that the avenue had the potential to rival the beautiful Champs Elysees in Paris:

...[I] anticipate the construction of a great thoroughfare here, bordered with flowers and embellished with works of art surpassing anything in the country in an aesthetic sense. We have caught the infection of picturesqueness from Europe, the Champs Elysees, the Bois de Boulogne, Unter der Linden and the other handsome streets and parks of the old world.¹⁸

Another hoped that the Avenue would eventually lead to the union of St. Paul and Minneapolis:

... [The ‘Mississippi City’] shall rise in its beauty on the ancient site of St. Paul and Minneapolis, with 200,000 inhabitants bound together by this

¹⁷ Kahn M1.

¹⁸ Kahn M5.

picturesque highway, this [splendid] artery, this gorgeous ligament, this
bond of union and the assurance of commercial thrift.¹⁹

Because the city of St. Paul apparently did not do her part to get the project going, the ambitious plan envisioned by these early St. Paul leaders was never fully executed. However, bits and pieces of the grand scheme, such as the unusually wide roadway we see today, are evident if one looks closely.

University Avenue may not have been able to surpass the greatness of the Champs Elysees, but during its heyday, the avenue was one of the busiest and most prosperous streets in St. Paul. However, before the legendary streetcar system and the major commercial development that would follow, University was primarily a residential street. Its proximity to the two downtowns put it in a position to provide housing for an increasing labor force and additional land for the two expanding downtowns.

The Avenue's east end was settled as early as 1860, and would become known as Frogtown to St. Paul residents.²⁰ Most of those who settled in the area were Europeans, primarily Poles, Scandinavians, Germans and Irish, who found jobs in railroad shops and other similar industries nearby.²¹ In 1881, the first tracks for a horse drawn trolley were laid.²² This allowed for the opposite end of University Avenue to develop residentially as well. Real-estate tycoon Louis Menage, who was interested in plotting new subdivisions

¹⁹ Kahn M1.

²⁰ There are several theories regarding the origin of this name. One is that Frogtown is a reference to early French settlers of the area. Another theory is that Archbishop John Ireland, standing in nearby Calvary Cemetery, heard the frogs croaking in the wetlands just to the south and exclaimed, "That sounds like a frog town." It is true that the land was marshy, a characteristic that can still be detected in the buckling of the pavement on some of the streets.

²¹ Peggy Korsomo Kennon and Robert B. Drake, *Discover Saint Paul: A Short History of Seven St. Paul Neighborhoods* (Ramsey County Historical Society, 1979), 18.

²² Joanna Baymiller, "University Avenue Toots its Horn: A Case Study of Successful Commercial Revitalization in Saint Paul," *Architecture Minnesota* May/June (1977), 19.

along Minneapolis' southern boundaries, developed the neighborhood that would become known as Prospect Park, thus becoming one of the early horsecar suburbs of Minneapolis.



Prospect Park Water Tower,
Minneapolis. Photo by Charles J.
Hibbard; courtesy of the Minnesota
Historical Society

The horse car would not be around for long. Within the decade, the rapidly expanding populations of St. Paul and Minneapolis would outgrow the system.²³ Not only were the horse cars unreliable and slow - the trolleys could move at a pace of no more than six miles per hour - but also, horses were incredibly expensive to maintain. They required food, shelter and veterinarians, and their manure (which was often left to ripen on the street) was both a safety and a health hazard.²⁴ It soon became obvious to city leaders that the Twin Cities needed an urban transportation system that was more reliable, less messy, and more accommodating than the horse car.

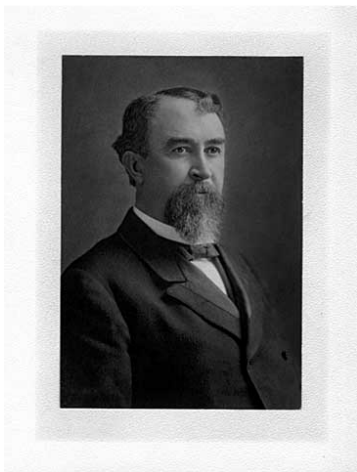
²³ In 1870, the federal census listed St. Paul with a population of 20,030, while Minneapolis had 13,066 people. By 1890, St. Paul had grown to 133,156 and Minneapolis to 164,738.

²⁴ John W. Diers and Aaron Isaacs, *Twin Cities by Trolley: The Streetcar Era in Minneapolis and St. Paul* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 15.

CHAPTER IV

THE ELECTRIC STREETCAR ERA: UNIVERSITY AVENUE IN ITS HEYDAY

Thomas Lowry, a prominent real estate magnate and businessman in the Twin Cities, was the head of the Minneapolis and St. Paul streetcar systems. Lowry understood the strong connection between transportation and development, and used his ever-expanding streetcar lines to stimulate development in areas where he owned residential real estate.²⁵ Lowry's vision, and the streetcar system that it created, allowed for Minneapolis and St. Paul to develop in an organized way. Instead of a jumble of factories, shops and homes sitting on top of one another, the streetcar system allowed for development to be planned and zoned. Residential neighborhoods could be organized near open spaces, and industry and manufacturing could develop near river and railroad transportation lines. In many ways, the Twin Cities and Lowry's streetcar system developed together; "wherever the streetcars ran, people, neighborhoods, and businesses followed."²⁶



Thomas Lowry; photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

²⁵ Alan R. Lind, *Twin City Rapid Transit Pictorial* (Park Forest, Illinois: Transport History Press, 1984), 10.

²⁶ Diers and Isaacs 177.

Similar to early city leaders, Lowry saw University Avenue as an opportunity both for development of his real estate holdings in the Midway District and for connecting the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul. In 1890, his vision became reality; the two cities were joined that December when the “interurban” line began operation on University Avenue.²⁷ Newspapers of the day noted the momentous occasion, and gave praise to the rapid transit company, for “the cars were packed so full on that first day of operation that it appeared that the two communities had exchanged their populations.”²⁸

The Interurban would continue to be extremely successful and would forever change the fabric of University Avenue. In fact, by 1891, the Interurban had attracted so many passengers that the Great Northern and the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul were forced to announce reductions in their commuter train services between Minneapolis and St. Paul. In particular, the Milwaukee Road expressed that it “might have to drop all local trains then providing hourly service via its “short line” route through the Midway district because the streetcars had taken over half the business.”²⁹ At peak hours, there were sixty cars in service on the Interurban line. You could “stand anywhere along University Avenue and there [would be] a steady parade of streetcars just a block or two apart, and most of them were standing room only. No one ever bothered to look at a schedule because waiting for the streetcar was like waiting for an elevator.”³⁰

By 1904, the streetcar system was outrunning its maintenance capabilities; it needed more shop capacity as well as additional streetcars. Due to its location midway

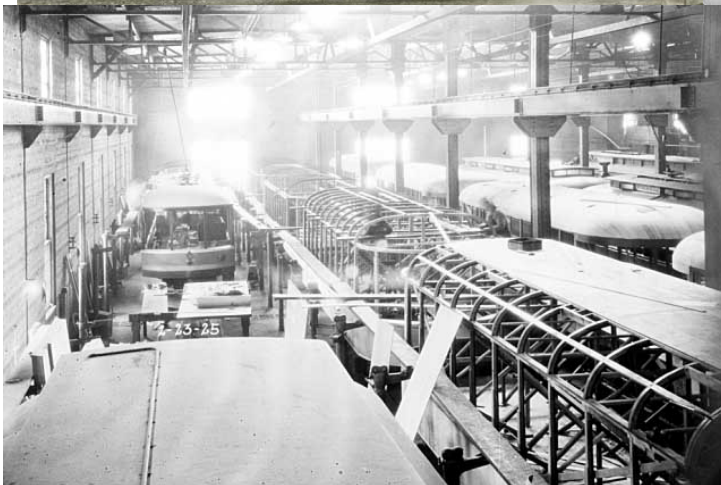
²⁷ Kieffer 18.

²⁸ Kieffer 18.

²⁹ Diers and Isaacs 201.

³⁰ Diers and Isaacs 7.

between the two cities on the Interurban line, a farsighted management had acquired sixty acres of land on Snelling Avenue near its intersection with University. It was here that the construction of the Snelling Shops would begin in September of 1904.³¹ The cars constructed in these facilities were unique in that they were “famed for ruggedness and extra-width,” two important features for a streetcar to have if it was to stand up to the rough Minnesota winters.³² The location of these shops near University spurred further growth and development along the avenue, for at peak demand times, as many as 500 people would work in the shops, creating an even larger flow of people traversing the avenue.³³



Top Left: A general view of the Snelling Shops; Top Right: Streetcars in Snelling Shops carhouses; Immediate Left: Cars being constructed at the Snelling Shops. All photos courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

³¹ Diers and Isaacs 65.

³² Kieffer 24.

³³ McClure 5.

The establishment of the Interurban streetcar line was one of the greatest catalysts for development in this district. In fact, the Census of 1910 indicates that the Midway area was the fastest-growing part of St. Paul. Even though the rest of the city was experiencing a population decrease, the Midway was displaying extraordinary growth; its population that year was listed at 21,134 people.³⁴

University Avenue was booming. Not only did it boast the “largest freight transfer in the world,” a shop facility recognized as one of the finest in the industry, and the busiest streetcar line in the city, but also, it was home to the state capitol at its east end. The capitol, completed in 1905, further spurred both residential and commercial growth along the avenue, and University became home to several office buildings as well.³⁵

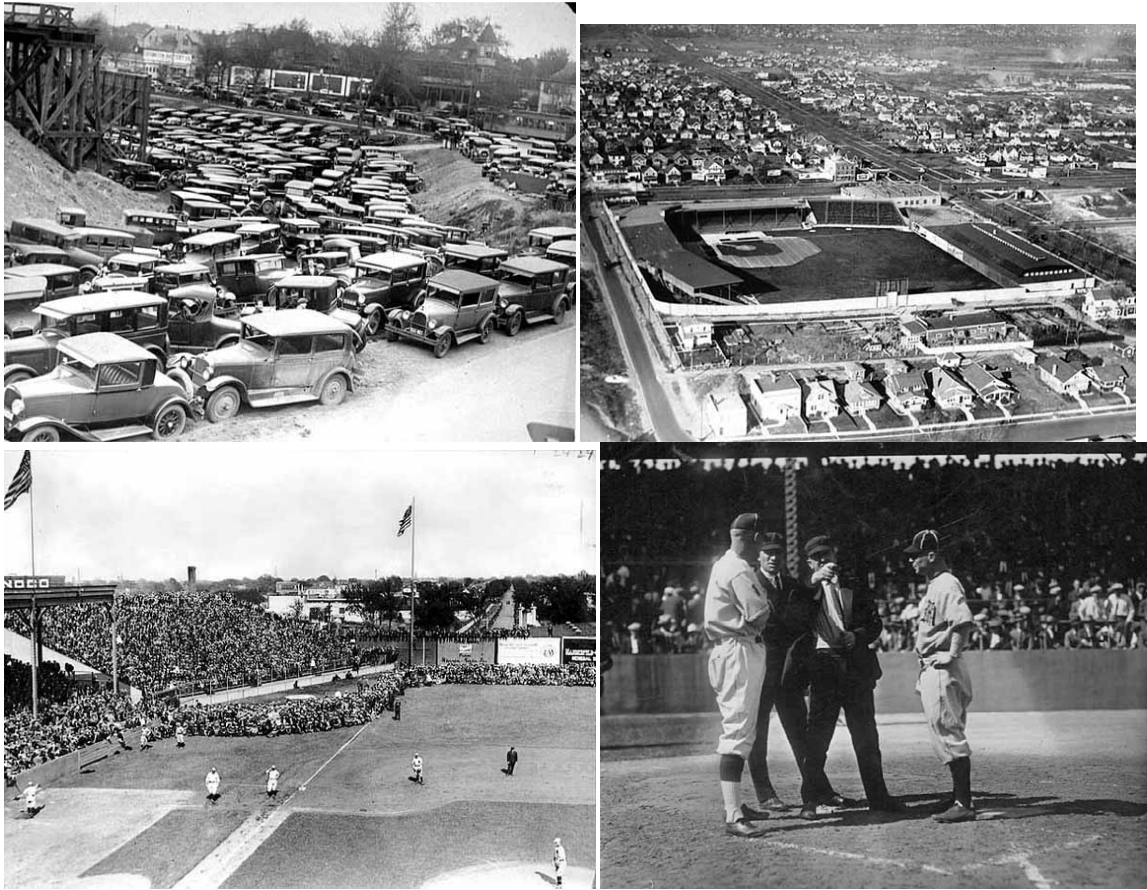
With such incredible commercial and residential growth, it was not surprising that University Avenue became somewhat of an entertainment destination. The Lexington baseball park at the intersection of Lexington and University was completed in 1897, and would be the site for the St. Paul Saints minor league baseball team for over 50 years. On opening day, the St. Paul Pioneer Press boasted, “St. Paul fans will see a ball ground that is not excelled in the West, and those familiar with the National League Parks say that few, if any, surpass [the greatness] of the St. Paul Park.”³⁶ “By the 1950s, the Saints and their cross-river competition, the Minneapolis Millers, had developed a rivalry that

³⁴ McClure 7.

³⁵ Baymiller 19.

³⁶ St. Paul (Minnesota). *Station Area Plans: Lexington Avenue* (St. Paul, Minnesota, 2008), 6.

mirrored one of the fiercest in the major leagues.”³⁷ On game days, fans would fill the University Avenue streetcars to the brim.



Top left: Parking lot at Lexington Ball Park on opening day; Top right: Aerial view of Lexington Ball Park, 1930; Bottom left: Baseball game at Lexington Park in 1916; Bottom right: Minneapolis and St. Paul teams in the first intercity game of 1926. Photos courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Other sources of entertainment would locate here as well. One such destination was the Prom Ballroom, which opened in 1941 on University Avenue near Lexington. For almost fifty years, the Prom provided live music and dancing for St. Paul residents. According to one source, when Glenn Miller’s orchestra played for the Prom’s opening

³⁷ William Wilcoxon, “University Avenue: A Work in Progress: An Entertainment Destination,” *Minnesota Public Radio News on the Web*, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/05/13/univaveentertainment> (May 2008).

night, “the floor was crowded by nearly 6,000 dancers, with half as many turned away at the door.”³⁸ Throughout its years of operation, the Prom attracted some of the top bands of the era; trumpeter Jules Herman and singer Lois Best played there regularly, and Buddy Holly played one of his last shows there as well.³⁹



Top left: Prom Ballroom marquis;
Top right: Jules Herman and Lois Best perform at the Prom, 1955;
Immediate left: Prom Ballroom dance floor on New Year’s Eve, 1964. All photos courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

³⁸ Wilcoxon.

³⁹ Wilcoxon.

In addition to being a source for entertainment, University Avenue also provided many opportunities for shopping. In April of 1921, Montgomery Ward opened its Midway store near the intersection of Snelling and University. This intersection was a prime location for a retail store; the railroad tracks just south of University Avenue, as well as the Minnesota Transfer Railway Yards allowed for easy delivery of goods, and the interurban streetcar line made the business accessible and visible to potential customers. On Montgomery Ward's opening night, visitors paid \$1 each to see "the area's finest and newest commercial building." Entertainment for the night included a fifteen-piece orchestra, Katherine B. Hensler's ten-piece Ladies' Band and singers and



dancers.⁴⁰ The *St. Paul Daily News* described the event as "the largest purely social entertainment of its kind ever held in Minnesota."⁴¹

University

Montgomery Ward and Company, 1920; photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Avenue continued to

flourish; in May of 1921, the thoroughfare acquired street lights, and the highly anticipated "Great White Way" along University was celebrated by a daytime parade of 300 decorated cars, as well as with a nighttime community dance in front of the Montgomery Ward store. When the streetlights were turned on at 9 p.m., the crowd

⁴⁰ McClure 10.

⁴¹ McClure 10.

roared with excitement.⁴² From ballparks to ballrooms, shopping centers to streetlights, University Avenue was becoming *the* place to be. The street was modernizing at an amazing rate.

⁴² McClure 10.

CHAPTER V

THE RECREATIONAL AUTOMOBILE ERA: STREETCARS TO AUTOMOBILES

With modernization came the automobile. In the beginning, the car was not necessarily viewed as a negative addition to the urban landscape. In fact, during its heyday, University saw many automobile-related activities, all of which added to the early reputation of the avenue as a thriving thoroughfare.

In 1914, a sub-assembly Ford plant was constructed at University Avenue's east end, and would see a production rate of 500 vehicles per year.⁴³ A rival company, Overland, would locate on the opposite end of the avenue near Minnesota State Highway 280.⁴⁴ Car dealerships would soon follow. In 1918, Owen Motor Sales opened as one of the early car dealerships in St. Paul. Increasing car ownership spurred many spin-off businesses, including repair shops, auto parts stores, filling stations, storage garages, and tire centers.⁴⁵ According to a business directory, by 1926, car-oriented retail had become a dominant part of the University Avenue streetscape.⁴⁶

⁴³ Brian McMahon, "The Ford Building: An Historical Overview." *University UNITED: Initiatives and Programs*, <http://www.universityunited.com/projects.htm#ford>.

⁴⁴ Laura Yuen, "University Avenue: A Work in Progress: The Car Culture," *Minnesota Public Radio News on the Web*, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/05/13/univavecars> (May 2008).

⁴⁵ Steve Trimble, *Historic Photos of St. Paul* (Nashville: Turner Publishing Company, 2008), 111.

⁴⁶ Baymiller 19.



Ford Motor Company, 117 University Avenue, 1920. The building was constructed just prior to the invention of the assembly line, which explains its vertical design. Photo Courtesy of Brian McMahon of University UNITED.

For several years, the automobile and the streetcar shared the road. In fact, in 1920, there were 75,000 automobiles driving around the Twin Cities, the same year that the Twin City Rapid Transit Company hit its all-time peak of 238 million passengers.⁴⁷ Even the buses, which gave the streetcar a bit of competition in 1918, were no match for the TCRT in those days; the company simply bought them out and ran them as feeders into their own system.⁴⁸

However, as the population began to increase, and as the level of personal incomes rose, transportation preferences shifted. Even though travel by personal automobile was much more expensive than travel by streetcar, more and more people began to choose the former. After all, the comfort and the convenience of the car were much more attractive than the crowds, delays, and the waiting out-of-doors associated with the trolleys.⁴⁹ It became harder and harder for the two forms of transportation to share the road; an increasing number of automobiles on the street caused congestion, making it difficult for streetcars to move at an efficient pace. The streetcar passengers

⁴⁷ John W. Diers, "The Force that Shaped Neighborhoods: 1890-1953, sixty-three years of streetcars and millions of dollars in investments," *Ramsey County History* 40:1 (Spring 2005), 6.

⁴⁸ Diers and Isaacs 109.

⁴⁹ Alan Altshuler, *The City Planning Process: A Political Analysis* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), 19.

began disappearing at a rapid rate; in 1922 there were 226 million passengers, and by 1932, that number had dropped to 113 million.⁵⁰

The TCRT was hopeful that their system would see resurgence in the coming years; the company was not ready to give up. In order to accommodate the several different modes of transportation traversing the roadways, many streets, including University, had to be widened. According to one St. Paul resident, “by 1931, University had been widened to accommodate two lanes of traffic with a center lane for streetcars. But progress had its price. Our house was moved back thirty feet, while other homes were demolished. By [the end of] 1931, there were just four houses left on our block.”⁵¹ This resident was unaware at the time that this affair was just the first of many hard blows to University and its surrounding neighborhoods.

During World War II, gasoline for private use was rationed, and in 1940, the Twin City streetcar system got a second wind of prosperity; however this success was to be short-lived. In 1949, TCRT lost almost a half million dollars due to loss of ridership, and shareholders of the company wanted a change. Therefore, between 1951 and 1954, all rail operations were gradually dismantled.⁵² Because the St. Paul lines had lower ridership than Minneapolis, their streetcars were the first to go. University’s Interurban line was severed in 1953; buses took over the St. Paul portion of the street, and met the streetcars from Minneapolis at the city limits. By 1954, the Minneapolis portion of the line was gone as well.⁵³

⁵⁰ Kieffer 43.

⁵¹ Bernice M. Fisher, “Growing up in St. Paul: Homer Van Meter, a member of the Karpis Gang, was shot across the street from our house,” *Ramsey County History* 38:1 (spring 2003), 25-27.

⁵² Diers and Isaacs 121.

⁵³ Diers and Isaacs 128.



Top right: Looking west on University Avenue at Emerald Street. The large “St. Paul City Limits” sign is at right. At this time, streetcars and automobiles could easily share the road. Bottom right: Looking east at a University Avenue streetcar on Ninth Street entering the intersection with Eighth Street and Wabasha Street, as a streetcar passes on Wabasha Street in the foreground. The photograph was taken in 1951, when it became harder for automobiles and streetcars to share the road. Bottom left: The St. Paul portion of the University Avenue streetcar line between Minneapolis and St. Paul was replaced by buses, but the Minneapolis portion of the line still used streetcars for part of 1953. Passengers had to transfer at Emerald Street, the city limits. All photos courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Initially University took this conversion from streetcars to buses and automobiles quite well. In fact, the street soon got the reputation as *the* place to be if you had a car.

Larry Kasella, a long-time resident of St. Paul, explains, “You know how when you go to

Las Vegas, and everyone goes to the strip? In St. Paul, for the young crowd, University Avenue was the place.”⁵⁴

Kasella was referring to a time when drive-thru diners were popping up along the avenue, the most popular of which was Porky’s drive-in, established in 1953. Kids like Kasella “would start the evening by washing their cars” and would then cruise back and forth along University, stopping to meet up with friends at Porky’s several times over the course of the night.⁵⁵

The street was in the process of reinventing itself. In addition to being the place to be to *cruise* in your car, it became the place to be if you wanted to *purchase* a car. “You could take your pick—Ford, Oldsmobile, Plymouth—just about any car made in America you could buy on University Avenue.” Car dealer Tom Krebsbach explains, “It was huge. It was the premier car strip in the state of Minnesota. At one time, there might have been 17 car dealerships on University Avenue.”⁵⁶

University soon began to respond to the new automobile culture in terms of urban design as well. Throughout the next fifty years, the streetscape would be developed in a way that would give preference to the automobile rather than the pedestrian. One of the first major car-oriented developments was the Midway Center, which opened in 1954 on the southeast corner of Snelling and University Avenues. Its design included a set-back from the street to make room for a large parking lot at its front. Even Lexington Park, the former home of the St. Paul Saints, was demolished in 1958 to make way for a \$3 million

⁵⁴ Yuen.

⁵⁵ Yuen.

⁵⁶ Yuen.

shopping center. The old stadium and the Coliseum Roller Rink would soon be little more than memories; a Red Owl and other stores would be constructed in their place.⁵⁷



Left: Porky's Drive-In; Right: Midway Shopping Center at University and Snelling, Murphy Department Store, 1960. Photos Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

⁵⁷ McClure 18.

CHAPTER VI

THE FREEWAY ERA: PROGRESS WITH A PRICE

In the years 1947-1950, automobile registrations in the Twin Cities area increased by 58 per cent, twenty times the rate of increase during the previous two decades.⁵⁸ City streets were becoming more and more congested, and it soon became evident that mass conversion to automobile travel would be necessary. The Federal Aid Highway Act came about in 1956 as a solution to problems of congestion; it provided for the construction of a 40,000-mile national system of freeways, of which 90 per cent of the cost would be borne by the federal government and 10 per cent by the states.⁵⁹

Even before this act came about, city leaders and the Minnesota Highway Department (MHD) saw the need for an expressway between the central business districts of St. Paul and Minneapolis.⁶⁰ In fact, civic leaders and MHD began making plans for an expressway as early as the mid-1940s, and in 1947, the St. Paul City Council approved MHD's St. Anthony plan. The expressway would run along St. Anthony Avenue, which paralleled University Avenue, and would extend all the way from the central business district in St. Paul to Minneapolis. In addition, it would run near both the University of Minnesota and the Midway Industrial District.

The St. Anthony route provided the most direct route from downtown St. Paul to downtown Minneapolis; however, the fact that it ran right through Rondo, a primarily African American neighborhood in St. Paul, was cause for concern by some. George

⁵⁸ Altshuler 21.

⁵⁹ Altshuler 22.

⁶⁰ Patricia Cavanaugh, *Politics and Freeways: Building the Twin Cities Interstate System* (Minneapolis: The Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2006), 14.

Herrold, the St. Paul city engineer at the time, was one of those concerned. He was opposed to freeways going through cities, for he was concerned about land use and the dislocation of people and businesses. He proposed an alternate route that would run adjacent to the railroad tracks north of St. Anthony Avenue; however, the Minnesota Highway Department rejected this route because it was less direct and did not serve the Midway area as well.⁶¹ Brian McMahon of University UNITED, a not-for-profit claims that “in those days, routes were selected primarily by engineers for the purpose of relieving traffic congestion, without much regard to other urban concerns.”⁶²

Despite opposition from Herrold, St. Paul’s downtown merchants, the historic African-American community of Rondo, and the Prospect Park neighborhood in Minneapolis, I-94 was built as planned. Construction began in the early 1960s and was completed in 1967. The hardest hit of the opposition groups was the Rondo community; one in eight African Americans in St. Paul lost a home to I-94, and many black-owned businesses, such as barbershops and movie theaters, were lost and never replaced.⁶³

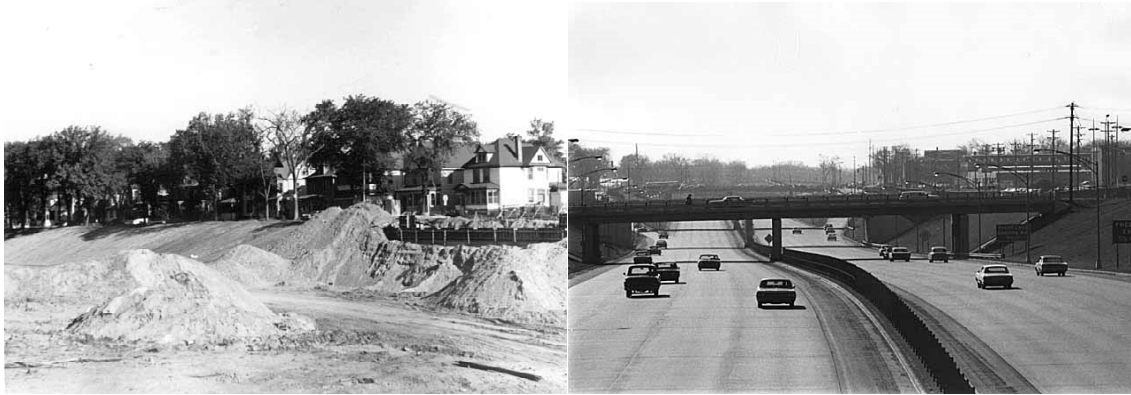
The construction of I-94 would have lasting effects directly on University Avenue, for the convenience of quick access to other places meant the loss of numerous office, retail, residential and industrial properties along the route. In just one year after construction of the freeway, traffic counts on University were reduced from an estimated daily volume of about 29,000 vehicles to 19,000 vehicles.⁶⁴ Businesses along the avenue were struggling to survive, and some would go to great lengths to stay afloat.

⁶¹ Cavanaugh 14.

⁶² Brian McMahon, “Learning from I-94” (University UNITED), 1.

⁶³ Cavanaugh 16.

⁶⁴ Diers.



Left: Interstate 94 construction at Dale Street and St. Anthony, 1966. Right: Looking west on Interstate 94 from near Snelling Avenue, 1967. Photos courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

One such business was the Faust Theater, which opened in 1912 at the southwest corner of University Avenue and Dale Street. The theater began as a showplace oriented to families and singles who rented in the area, and for more than sixty years, it continued this trend. Times were changing though; the construction of I-94 allowed people to bypass University Avenue completely and go straight to the suburbs, a place where more and more people were calling home. The Faust soon found competition from new theaters that took advantage of the cheap land and growing population found at the outer edges of the city, and rather than fight a losing battle, in 1974, the theater followed a national trend and began showing X-rated films.⁶⁵

The Faust became an anchor for a sex-related business district that would develop along University Avenue. Men from all over the Twin Cities area were attracted to the district by topless dancing bars and X-rated stores. Former St. Paul police chief, Bill Finney describes:

⁶⁵ Dirk Johnson, "A Showcase for Sex Is Run Out of Town, But Not Far Enough," *New York Times on the Web*, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/29/us/a-showcase-for-sex-is-run-out-of-town-but-not-far-enough.html> (April 1990).

Kitty-corner from the Faust was the Belmont, which was a topless dancing bar. Topless, and occasionally bottomless. Going east toward the capitol, there was a place called the Bunny Patch, and then there was a number of little X-rated stores. It moved the prostitution. The streetwalkers moved from Selby Avenue and downtown to University Avenue. Women who lived near University were commonly harassed by men cruising for prostitutes.⁶⁶

University soon got the reputation for being seedy and unsafe, an image the city obviously did not want for the avenue. Due to First Amendment laws however, nude dance parlors and pornographic bookstores are completely legal; there is little a city can do to close them down. The city of St. Paul was not going to give up easily though.

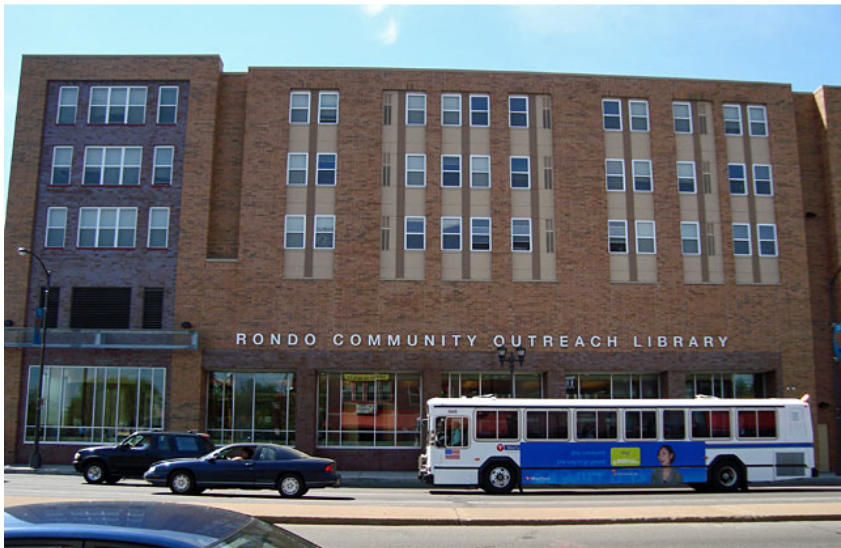
In 1989, the city of St. Paul contracted with a private developer to make a deal with the owner of several of the offending theaters. The plan worked; the developer purchased several of the properties and then sold them to the City for a small profit.⁶⁷ Gradually, the city bought out all of the offending properties, and slowly, the area was turned around. Former St. Paul mayor George Latimer expresses, “It seemed kind of crazy at the time to be spending public dollars to buy up porn shops.”⁶⁸ Even though it took almost twenty years for many of the properties to find a use, most would agree that it was a step that needed to be taken. The Belmont Club was turned into a police station,

⁶⁶ Wilcoxon.

⁶⁷ Interview by Peter Meyers with George Latimer, April 2011.

⁶⁸ Wilcoxon.

and in 2006, a public library was built at the site of the Faust.⁶⁹ The street's image was slowly changing for the better, and more revitalization efforts would surface in the coming years.



The Rondo Community Outreach Library now at the corner of Lexington and University Avenues now occupies the site of the Faust Theater. Photo courtesy of Minnesota Public Radio.

The revival of University Avenue's east end is thanks in large part to the recent influx of immigrants from Southeast Asia, specifically Hmong refugees escaping violence in Laos and Thailand, among other places.⁷⁰ The first wave of these immigrants was attracted to the area due to its cheap housing caused by years of decline and neglect and a reputation of the neighborhood as unsafe. They soon established businesses, which set off a new wave of immigration to University Avenue that continues to this day.

⁶⁹ The Rondo Community Outreach Library is an award-winning mixed-use building that includes three floors of housing in addition to the 31,000 sq. foot library.

⁷⁰ Jessica Mador, "University Avenue: A Work in Progress: Immigrants Always Welcome," *Minnesota Public Radio on the Web*, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/05/13/univaveimmigrants> (May 2008).

Currently, there are at least one hundred Asian-owned businesses in operation along the avenue.⁷¹ One can purchase roast duck at the Shuang Hur Asian market, have a meal at Krua Thailand Restaurant, get alterations done at Ker's Tailoring and Alteration, or buy an outfit at Shoua's Clothing. The businesses allow native Minnesotans to get a taste of a new culture, but also allow for immigrants to maintain a connection to their home countries. A shopper at the Shuang Hur Asian market explains:

I come from Vietnam. I find a lot of things that I miss in my homeland, like those fruits, tropical fruits and yam, different kinds of yam. A lot of things that we miss and we couldn't find in American grocery stores [we can now find here].⁷²

In order to ensure that customers such as this one continue to shop in their stores, several Asian small business owners founded the Asian Economic Development Association (AEDA) in 2006. According to their website, their mission is to cultivate a vibrant, diverse community by creating economic opportunities. The organization believes "that economic justice and well-being are foundations of strong multicultural neighborhoods and community leadership."⁷³ AEDA has provided business workshops to Asian entrepreneurs, and is currently working to brand the east end of the avenue as

⁷¹ Asian Economic Development Association (AEDA), *About AEDA*, http://www.aeda-mn.org/about_aeda.html.

⁷² Mador.

⁷³ AEDA.

“Little Mekong”.⁷⁴ The organization hopes this marketing and place-making strategy will improve the visibility and economic stability of Asian businesses along the avenue.



Left: Shuang Hur Supermarket; Right: mangosteen fruit at Shuang Hur Supermarket. Photos Courtesy of Minnesota Public Radio.



Southeast Asian immigration to University Avenue began a process of amazing community-driven revitalization along University; however, if the avenue was going to continue to revitalize, more systematic efforts would be necessary. The University Avenue Development Council (UADC), established in 1976, would provide the avenue with this type of organized redevelopment for several years. The Council was made up of University Avenue business owners and representatives from various neighborhood organizations. One of its primary goals was to encourage existing businesses to stay on the avenue by determining their needs and by assisting them in improving. In addition, the Council sought to improve the image of the avenue as a viable commercial street, as well as to attract new businesses to locate on the avenue.⁷⁵

One of the first revitalization efforts the Council completed was a “vigorous crusade against visual blight,” a movement made possible due to Community Development funding from the City of Saint Paul. The effort included the removal of

⁷⁴ AEDA.

⁷⁵ Baymiller 19.

blighted signs along the avenue, and proved to be quite successful. Several Twin City sign companies donated crews and equipment, and by the end of the day, deteriorated commercial signs from over 26 locations along the Avenue were removed. According to several active businesspeople, “it was the first visible sign of improvement on the avenue.”⁷⁶

Then, in January of 1977, the architectural consulting firm Grebner-Schoen, hired by UADC in early 1976, completed the University Avenue Commercial Revitalization Program Implementation Guide. The plan recommended programs that would “take advantage of opportunities already existing and strengthen areas which had a recognizable image on the street”.⁷⁷ For instance, four specific sub districts were outlined in the guide- one oriented toward the automobile, another towards residential, an entertainment and retail section, and finally, one that would take advantage of proximity to the capitol.⁷⁸

In March of the same year, UADC formed a companion organization, the University Avenue Development Corporation. This local development corporation (LDC) came out of a program set up by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), whose goal it was to funnel low-interest loans into small businesses. The Corporation would make available SBA guaranteed loans of up to \$500,000 per business. With this money, the potential for development and revitalization along the avenue was “greater than perhaps any time in the avenue’s recent history.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Baymiller 19.

⁷⁷ Baymiller 20.

⁷⁸ Baymiller 21.

⁷⁹ Baymiller 21.

Meanwhile, in 1977, the Economic Development Committee of the Midway Civic and Commerce invited the District Councils bordering University Avenue to participate in its meetings, which eventually led to the formal establishment of University UNITED, a collaboration of businesses and residents, in 1981. The existing Local Development Corporations (LDCs), including the University Avenue Development Corporation, would merge to form the University Midway Local Development Company, which in turn would merge with University UNITED in 1991.

Throughout its roughly thirty years of existence, University UNITED has undertaken a variety of projects, and has produced several reports, all of which have helped in the avenue's revitalization efforts. A defining moment for University UNITED was in 1987, when Chair Bruce Davis coordinated the commissioning of a comprehensive planning study for the University Avenue Corridor. The study described the potential for new commercial and housing development along the corridor, and was largely adopted into the City Comprehensive Plan.

Often times, plans such as this one sit on shelves and gather dust, but University UNITED was able to coordinate the implementation of some of the plan's recommendations. In the early 1990s, with funding from the City of St. Paul, UNITED was able to finance the development of an Asian/International mini-mall to be named International Plaza. In addition, the program provided enough money to upgrade the streetscape with seventeen new ornamental street lanterns, and façade improvements for seventeen businesses in the two-block stretch between Western and Mackubin Avenues. "By 1993, the program had leveraged \$3.4 million in private investment, the creation of

65 full-time and 12 part-time jobs, and 35 new businesses.”⁸⁰ The success of this project would give University UNITED the momentum it needed to produce several more successful projects and reports in the coming years.⁸¹

According to Brian McMahon, the current executive director of University UNITED, a current priority of the organization is to change the orientation of the avenue from an automobile-oriented thoroughfare to a pedestrian-friendly zone that encourages public transportation ridership.⁸² The Midway Center Master Plan provides a good example of such an effort. The plan explains:

The Midway Area in St. Paul has experienced significant development in recent years, primarily large- scale retail development characterized by large parking lots and “big box” retail projects. The large land parcels needed to accommodate these use demands has resulted in a suburban pattern that [discourages walking].⁸³

The plan is an integrated, mixed-use development that includes a mid-rise office building, a hotel, a movie theater, and retail and restaurants, among other things. In addition, it would enable the “creation of human-scaled urban design, sensitive to the needs of pedestrians with integrated planning and attractive landscaping.”⁸⁴

⁸⁰ University UNITED. *About Us: A More Complete History of University UNITED*, <http://www.universityunited.com/Mission.htm#history> (May 2009).

⁸¹ For a more complete history of projects and reports done by University UNITED, see <http://www.universityunited.com/index.html>.

⁸² Interview with Brian McMahon, July 25, 2010.

⁸³ University UNITED, *Midway Center Master Plan* (August 1998).

⁸⁴ Metropolitan Council.

If one looks down University Avenue today, he would not see this pedestrian-oriented thoroughfare envisioned by University UNITED. For the past several decades, the avenue has been developed with automobile-oriented businesses. Though this type of development may not have been ideal, it was replacing large industrial land parcels that were not being used at all. This development has allowed for the avenue to grow economically; however, it has a lot of potential to be improved. It would take years, but the city would eventually begin to prioritize pedestrian-oriented development, and a new comprehensive plan would be created for the Central Corridor.

CHAPTER VII

THE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT ERA: UNIVERSITY AVENUE’S NEVER-ENDING TRANSIT STUDY

It would take almost four decades, but the city would eventually approve a transit-oriented development plan for University Avenue. Allen Lovejoy, senior transportation planner for the City of St. Paul, believes that the reason approval for light rail transit (LRT) has taken so long has to do with need, the political climate, and the economy. “University Avenue has had a *need* for light rail for many years. It has just taken a while for politics to catch up to the *idea* of light rail transit.”⁸⁵ In fact, it has taken over thirty years for the politics of LRT to work itself out; the first talk of LRT came in 1972 when the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC) undertook an analysis of the metropolitan area’s transit needs.

The transportation study that the MTC completed, called the Regional Fixed Guideway Study, recommended that the Urban Mass Transit Administration (UMTA) and the State Legislature come up with \$1.3 billion to build a 57-mile intermediate capacity rail system. According to former Metropolitan Council transportation director, Larry Dallam, “It was sort of the Twin Cities answer to [San Francisco’s Bay Area Rapid Transit System (BART)].”⁸⁶ Apparently, the Met Council did not see a need to get quite so high-tech, for they refused to look at MTC’s study, and did their own, which suggested a fixed guideway for buses as a solution to downtown congestion. Little was made of either study; the legislature put both aside. One year later, the legislature gave the MTC

⁸⁵ Interview with Allen Lovejoy, July 21, 2010.

⁸⁶ Guntzel.

\$500,000 to study the only transportation method that had yet to be discussed: “small driverless, electrically powered vehicles called people movers.” According to *City Pages*:

The Small Vehicle Fixed Guideway Study stimulated people-mover talk on both sides of the river in 1975. The St. Paul City Council believed that the machines, which would have connected the state Capitol, Town Square, the Civic Center and ten other downtown locations with a \$120 million sidewalk in the sky, were the wave of the future.⁸⁷

Fortunately or not, the people-mover plan did not make it very far; the city of St. Paul was forced to withhold its \$12 million contribution in 1980 after the Legislature declined approval. Shortly after the failure of the people-mover plan, city leaders, urban planners, and various officials from state and local agencies attended a conference where the conference report, “Light Rail Transit: A solution for the Twin Cities,” convinced policy makers to reconsider the transit issue. The Metropolitan Council was awarded \$150,000 by the Legislature to once again study the feasibility of light rail in the metro area, and more conferences, hearings, reports, and recommendations on the issue followed.⁸⁸

During his term, Donald Moe, Minnesota senator from 1981-1990, attempted to “establish an inter-city University Avenue Development Authority that would propose transit, housing and commercial projects to reshape the corridor,”⁸⁹ and in 1982, a bill

⁸⁷ Guntzel.

⁸⁸ Guntzel.

⁸⁹ Kahn M1.

was working its way through the Legislature that had the potential to put an end to the “never-ending transit study.”⁹⁰ Moe explained:

I’m trying to recapture the spirit of [the 1873] proposal. I see a grand new street, with thousands of new housing units, hundreds of million dollars in new commercial development and a fast new transit system. University Avenue still provides the best opportunity for a strong connection to the two central business districts. There are thousands of feet of vacant University Avenue frontage. Rents and land values are relatively cheap.⁹¹

Although Moe’s plan had the support of both St. Paul Mayor George Latimer and of Minneapolis Mayor Donald Fraser, the timing just was not right for light rail along University.

Yet another study was done on the feasibility of LRT on University Avenue in 1984. The study, entitled *University Avenue Transit: Bus or Light Rail?*, was completed by the St. Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development, and concluded that LRT would provide greater transit benefit for the area than other alternatives. According to the report:

Evaluation is based on the performance of each alternative projected to the year 2000. LRT, integrated with an appropriate feeder bus system, will attract the largest number of riders. It will therefore contribute most to

⁹⁰ Editorial Page, “University Avenue looking up.” *St. Paul Dispatch* (26 February 1982), 4A.

⁹¹ Kahn M1.

reduction of traffic congestion and parking problems. LRT will provide the most reliable transit, that is, the transit least affected by the contingencies of bad weather and heavy traffic. While capital costs are highest for a light rail system, operating costs are lowest. LRT is the only system in which farebox receipts would actually cover operating costs for a University Avenue line. Because of the lower operating cost, LRT is least apt to require an increase in local property taxes. LRT will do most to attract new development, particularly in downtown St. Paul, and it will reduce some of the negative environmental effects of the bus system.⁹²

The study includes a detailed explanation of each evaluation criterion, including projected ridership, service quality, reliability, operating cost, capital cost, effect on the St. Paul Property Tax, development potential, and environmental impact. However, at the time, it did not seem to matter how feasible light rail on University Avenue was, for the right amount of political and financial support did not exist.

Several years later, in January of 2001, ground was broken for construction of the Hiawatha Line, a light rail corridor that would stretch 12.3 miles and that would connect numerous major employment centers, including the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and the Mall of America. The line proved to be much more successful than anyone had thought; in just one year, it surpassed its ten-year goal of 24,000 passengers.⁹³ Considering the array of studies done on the University Line one may wonder why the Hiawatha was built first. According to Allen Lovejoy, who started

⁹² St. Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development, *University Avenue Transit: Bus or Light Rail?* (28 September 1984), iii.

⁹³ Lovejoy Interview.

working with the Central Corridor in 1981, the Hiawatha line was politically easier to gain approval for. A line along University requires the tearing up of a major city street and the disruption of businesses. Hiawatha on the other hand, is built on a nearly exclusive railway. Once the Hiawatha line had been constructed and had proven to be successful, talk regarding LRT on University, “the backbone of the system,” could begin again.⁹⁴



The Hiawatha Rail Line passing through Government Plaza station in downtown Minneapolis. Photo Courtesy of the Metropolitan Council.

The most recent plan for light rail on University Avenue was endorsed by the Central Corridor Coordinating committee in June of 2006, and gained approval by the Metropolitan Council later that month.⁹⁵ According to Allen Lovejoy, this was when the project started to become “serious,” a fact partly due to the takeover of the project by the Metropolitan Council that same year.⁹⁶ Utility relocation construction began in the fall of

⁹⁴ Lovejoy Interview.

⁹⁵ Metropolitan Council, “Metropolitan Council approves light rail along Central Corridor,” *Metropolitan Council News Releases*, http://www.metrocouncil.org/news/2006/news_537.htm (June 2008).

⁹⁶ Lovejoy Interview.

2010, and construction on the light rail line itself began in March, soon after federal approval of the project came through.

Like any major city development project, the Central Corridor has had to overcome numerous obstacles, both financially and politically, and perhaps most importantly, socially. Many opposition groups have surfaced throughout the planning process, including business owners, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), and the University of Minnesota (U of M). Business owners are concerned about the loss of on-street parking, as well as the negative economic effects the construction phase will have on their stores;⁹⁷ the NAACP believes that the line's location unfairly and disproportionately impacts minority neighborhoods;⁹⁸ MPR is concerned that the light rail trains will have a negative impact on their recording studios on Cedar Street in downtown St. Paul;⁹⁹ and the U of M has raised concerns over possible traffic disruption and destructive vibrations at some of their research facilities.¹⁰⁰ Three lawsuits have come out of these concerns, one from the NAACP, one from MPR, and the last from the U of M. In September of 2010, the U of M officially dropped their lawsuit against the Central Corridor after the Met Council agreed to aid in the mitigation of any possible damage done to university laboratories or equipment during construction of the line.¹⁰¹ The lawsuit with the NAACP ended with the conclusion by the Minnesota Supreme Court judge that "Central

⁹⁷ Laura Yuen, "University Avenue business owners step up opposition to LRT," *Minnesota Public Radio News on the Web*, http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/08/11/lrt_opposition/ (August 2008).

⁹⁸ Lovejoy Interview.

⁹⁹ Jim Foti, "Volume rises as U, Met Council debate Central Corridor route," *Star Tribune on the Web*, <http://www.startribune.com/local/stpaul/19291439.html> (May 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Lovejoy Interview.

¹⁰¹ Tim Post, "U of M officially drops lawsuit against Central Corridor light rail," *Minnesota Public Radio News on the Web*, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2010/09/08/regents-light-rail-lawsuit/?refid=0> (September 2010).

Corridor light-rail planners failed to analyze how construction of the 11-mile transit line would affect businesses in the corridor.”¹⁰² The ruling requires light-rail planners to conduct further study of the transit line; however, the judge did not wish to delay the project, for he felt it was in the public’s best interest for it to stay on schedule. As of April 2011, the MPR lawsuit is still being litigated. According to Allen Lovejoy, none of these groups were opposed to the idea of light rail transit along University; they just would like it to be constructed in a specific way.¹⁰³

As the Central Corridor plan has gained momentum, many groups both at the local level and the national level have become interested in helping the project along, as well as in ensuring it gets completed in the most equitable and sustainable way possible. A notable group at the national level is the Funders Collaborative, which has been instrumental in creating a plan for the corridor that sees “beyond the rail.” The group stresses the importance of quality of life planning, and emphasizes that light rail “is not just about moving people.”¹⁰⁴

At the local level, groups range from the University 7 (U7), the University Avenue Business Association (UABA), University UNITED, U-PLAN, the Asian Economic Development Association (AEDA), the African American Chamber of Commerce, and the Hmong Chamber of Commerce. All groups have been instrumental in ensuring that input from community members is heard and considered throughout the planning process. For instance, U-PLAN, a community-based planning studio sponsored by University UNITED, opened in 2006 as a way to give “the little guys along the avenue

¹⁰² Laura Yuen, “Rondo plaintiffs get partial victory in light rail ruling,” *Minnesota Public Radio News on the Web*, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2011/01/27/central-corridor-rondo-lawsuit/> (January 2011).

¹⁰³ Lovejoy Interview.

¹⁰⁴ Lovejoy Interview.

the wherewithal to re-imagine the landscape and examine various options for redeveloping it.”¹⁰⁵ The studio came about largely as a reaction to the construction of I-94, when small community groups had little power to change the course of development that the “big guys” wanted.¹⁰⁶ With U-PLAN, community members are now “armed with resources;”¹⁰⁷ the studio gives local residents and small-business people the kind of data once reserved for government officials and large-scale developers.¹⁰⁸

Approving and planning for light rail transit has been a long and often times frustrating process; however, the various obstacles the project has had to face have led to positive outcomes. Certain positive aspects of the project have come about due to changes in political parties, for instance. Specifically, the Bush era and the Obama era have looked at transit issues much differently. Under President Bush, New Start funding¹⁰⁹ put emphasis on a cost-effectiveness index, which measures how much a project will cost per total hours saved daily by the estimated number of riders.¹¹⁰ Yonah Freemark, writer for the *Transport Politic*, explains:

The cost-benefit analysis is heavily biased towards the number of annual hours commuters will save by using the new transit system. This means that people who already have longer commutes are seen as more valuable

¹⁰⁵ Frank Jossi, “U-Plan gives the little guy a leg up in redeveloping University,” *St. Paul Villager* v.54:20 (December 2006/January 2007), 1.

¹⁰⁶ McMahon Interview.

¹⁰⁷ McMahon Interview.

¹⁰⁸ Jossi 1.

¹⁰⁹ The Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) discretionary New Starts program is the federal government’s primary financial resource for supporting locally-planned, implemented, and operated transit “guideway” capital investments. For more information, see http://www.fta.dot.gov/planning/newstarts/planning_environment_217.html.

¹¹⁰ Yonah Freemark, “US Government Plans Overhaul of New Start Funding Guidelines, Reducing Importance of Cost-Effectiveness,” *The Transport Politic*, <http://www.thetransportpolitic.com/2010/01/13/us-government-plans-overhaul-of-new-start-funding-guidelines-reducing-importance-of-cost-effectiveness/> (January 2010).

for the FTA than those who choose to live in in-town locations with shorter distances between their residences and workplaces. As a result, transit networks are encouraged to extend out into the suburbs, rather than be densified and reinforced downtown.¹¹¹

Under the Obama era, the cost-effectiveness index has been overhauled. His Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development see transit projects as more than just moving as many people possible as quickly as possible;¹¹² it is about economic development, new investment and neighborhood revitalization.¹¹³

One specific positive aspect that has come about due to more emphasis on livability and less emphasis on moving people has been the addition of three light-rail station stops along the corridor at Victoria Street, Hamline and Western Avenues.¹¹⁴ St. Paul neighborhood activists had been arguing for the stops as a way to better serve residents of the Frogtown neighborhood. The stops were approved in early 2010, soon after the overhaul of the cost-effectiveness index.

In addition, technology that was not available one hundred years ago will aid in the creation of a light rail corridor that is not only efficient, but also physically attractive. For instance, University Avenue is currently home to about 220 trees. The city would like to increase this number by about 1,000 so that there is a tree every thirty feet; however, due to the drying effects that a huge thoroughfare has on vegetation, trees often

¹¹¹ Freemark.

¹¹² Morrison Interview.

¹¹³ Chris Havens, "Central Corridor isn't just about moving people," *Star Tribune on the Web*, <http://www.startribune.com/local/87598407.html?page=1&c=y> (March 2010).

¹¹⁴ Chris Havens, "Funds OK'd for Central Corridor light rail station stops," *Star Tribune on the Web*, http://www.startribune.com/local/stpaul/83406517.html?elr=KArks7PYDiaK7DU2EPaL_V_9E7ODiUiD3aPc%3A_Yyc%3AaUU (February 2010).

do not survive. Cornell University has come up with an innovative plan that would not only solve the problem of tree loss, but would decrease the polluting effects of stormwater as well. Each tree will sit on top of an underground pit filled with a mixture of rock, sand and soil. Stormwater that would have once flowed into a pipe and into the Mississippi River will now flow through this pit. The rock-sand-soil mixture will filter the water while at the same time helping to nourish the tree.¹¹⁵

Such an addition to the light rail project may not seem important; however, improving the aesthetics of an urban environment has positive effects on perceptions and even realities of crime and safety. This assertion is supported in Part II with a quantitative analysis of crime rates along University Avenue over time.

Though physical investment can be made, we as residents should be careful to not always judge a book by its cover. Allen Lovejoy explains, “You can’t always judge what is going on along an avenue by looking at external investment. The poor upkeep of businesses on University Avenue’s east end is due to start-up business owners having very little capital to maintain the exterior of their buildings. The current aesthetics of University Avenue incorrectly represent what is happening on the street, and what could happen on the street”.¹¹⁶ He explains further that these start-up businesses are important to the economic development of a city and should be supported. The city is doing what it can to aid in the survival of these businesses; forgivable loans¹¹⁷ have been awarded to many businesses along the avenue as a way to encourage owners to upgrade their stores, and not for profits along the avenue are working on business retention plans that will be

¹¹⁵ Lovejoy Interview.

¹¹⁶ Lovejoy Interview.

¹¹⁷ A forgivable loan is made with the understanding that if the borrower meets certain requirements, repayment of the loan will not be required.

implemented during the LRT construction phase.¹¹⁸ Though Lovejoy makes a valid point, many have theorized that investment in the exteriors of buildings and the areas surrounding businesses and residences does, in fact, affect the actual activities of a street. This claim will be explored further in Part II.



Left: Xcel Energy crews began advanced utility relocation on July 6 on Robert Street north and south of Fourth Street and on Fourth Street between Minnesota and Robert Streets in downtown in St. Paul in anticipation of Central Corridor LRT construction in 2010. Right: Dale Street and University Avenue intersection in St. Paul with light rail and baseline elements.

¹¹⁸ Lovejoy Interview.

**PART II: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN URBAN
FORM AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS**

CHAPTER VIII

THEORY REVIEW

A key component of the newest trends in urban planning—transit-oriented development, smart growth, and New Urbanism—is the claim that by increasing densities, providing mixed-use development, and promoting walkability and alternate modes of transportation, the safety of our neighborhood streets will improve. These claims hark back to the ideas of Jane Jacobs, the writer and activist famous for her critiques of the urban renewal policies of the 1950s.

Jacobs argues that a successful city neighborhood is one in which a person feels safe and secure on the sidewalks. According to her theory, public peace is not kept by the police, but by the people themselves. The more a street is used, the safer it becomes, for “eyes on the street” create a do-it-yourself surveillance that discourages the committing of crime. Jacobs argues, however, that this method of people policing one another works best where the public is using and enjoying the city streets *voluntarily*. In order to create this voluntary use, city streets need a substantial quantity of stores and other public places that are used at all times of the day, as well as a dense development pattern that allows for constant use of every portion of the street.¹¹⁹

The automobile culture that has developed over the course of the past several decades has discouraged this kind of walkable and dense development pattern. Instead of urban streets densely developed with stores, bars and restaurants, our cities have become

¹¹⁹ Jacobs, Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: The Modern Library, 1961).

built up with surface parking lots, drive-thrus and big box stores that allow for people to commute from place to place without ever touching foot onto a sidewalk.

Others have continued to explore the relationship between the built environment and safety. Criminologist C. Ray Jeffrey notes that “Jane Jacobs really started a lot of us thinking along these lines, and looking at land use and how people relate to the land, how people interact with their environment as basic to crime prevention”.¹²⁰ Furthermore, in his book, *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* (1971), he argues for the need to focus on the circumstances surrounding a crime incident, rather than on the criminal offender.¹²¹ Other criminologists have expanded upon the idea that the environment influences human behavior. Brantingham and Brantingham (2008) suggest that offenders use their knowledge of the urban landscape to identify potential crime targets. Specifically, major transportation arteries and the areas near them become part of their awareness space, and therefore these spaces display higher concentrations of crime.¹²²

In 1972, Oscar Newman published *Defensible Space*, which became an essential addition to the literature on crime and environmental design. His work focuses on the physical design features that contribute to a secure environment: territoriality, or a sense of ownership in one’s property; and surveillance, or the ability to observe activities in parking lots, streets, and the like. Newman suggested that space could be constructed in a way that would improve territoriality and surveillance, thus deterring crime through the

¹²⁰ Timothy D. Crowe and Diane L. Zahm, “Crime Prevention through Environmental Design,” *Land Development Magazine* (fall 1994), 22-27.

¹²¹ Crowe.

¹²² Patricia L. Brantingham and Paul J. Brantingham, “Notes on the Geometry of Crime,” in *Principles of Geographic Offender Profiling*, eds. David Canter and Donna Youngs (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008).

creation of defensible spaces.¹²³ Specific design principles that Newman considers include strategic placement of windows to allow residents to naturally survey exterior spaces and the juxtaposition of building entries with city streets so as to create cohesion between the outside and inside worlds.

The “broken windows” theory, introduced by social scientists James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, expands upon Newman’s theory of territoriality and suggests that maintaining the urban environment may prevent vandalism.¹²⁴ Because individuals have been shown to pick up signals from their environment, a space that is well kept sends a signal that this is a place which is monitored, and which therefore deters individuals from committing a crime. On the other hand, an environment that is vandalized, littered, and disheveled sends the message that unwanted behavior goes without punishment.

According to the theories presented above, the built environment plays a key role in the ability to bring about appropriate behaviors and limit exposure to crime. Natural surveillance, dense development patterns, territoriality and maintenance of the urban environment all contribute to the safety of city streets. Thus, the automobile-centered development pattern that dominates the current American landscape should contribute to higher crime rates for several reasons. First, the low-density development pattern that has emerged as a result of the automobile contributes to fewer eyes on the street—stores are set too far apart from one another to promote walking, and fewer activities equates to fewer reasons for a person to visit the street at all. Second, the large surface parking lots that cars necessitate create spaces that are difficult to monitor—building entries that are juxtaposed with parking lots rather than sidewalks lose their connection to the public

¹²³ Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972).

¹²⁴ James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, “Broken Windows: the police and neighborhood safety,” (Atlantic Magazine, 1982).

street. Finally, low densities and wide-open and unmonitored spaces signal to potential offenders that this is an area where the chance of being caught is small. This sets off a downward spiral, because once certain types of behavior become the norm and once the landscape begins to show signs of this behavior in the form of vandalism for example, even more offenses are likely to occur, particularly those crimes that occur outside.

As the historical discussion in Part I revealed, University Avenue went from being a bustling, walkable, public-transit-friendly thoroughfare to being characterized by quintessential American car culture. Even before the streetcars were dismantled, development along University began prioritizing the private automobile. After the streetcars were gone for good, many areas of University Avenue continued to develop strip malls, surface parking lots, big-box stores and drive-thrus. Therefore, if the theories of crime prevention through environmental design hold true, then one should see a trend of rising crime levels along University Avenue over time. This hypothesis will be tested and analyzed in the following sections.

CHAPTER IX

METHODS

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship among transportation, urban form and crime along University Avenue. The effect transportation has had on the built environment was made clear in Part I. Part II expands upon this connection and explores the relationship between the built environment and safety by quantitatively exploring crime throughout time.

To begin, I collected both historic and current crime data for the city of St. Paul. A study done by the St. Paul City Planning Surveys Work Progress Administration within the Records Division of the St. Paul Bureau of Police provided me with detailed crime statistics for each St. Paul census tract for the year of 1937. After this year, crime statistics were not compiled into comprehensive reports until 1971, when the police department began assembling the statistics annually. My final study includes statistics from the years of 1937, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001. The sample years of 1937 and 1971 were chosen because they were the earliest two years from which data were available; the remaining years were chosen because they represent a sample of crime occurrences from each decade after 1970 and because they are spaced at equal intervals of ten years apart.

Studying any variable over time can be difficult because collection methods tend to vary substantially. In 1937, crime statistics were reported at the census tract level; however, from 1971- present, crime statistics have been reported by police grid. To deal with this issue, it was necessary to manipulate the crime data from each sample year into a consistent form, either into grids or into census tracts. Police grids encompass an area

of approximately 32-40 square blocks while census tracts encompass an area with a population of approximately 4,000 people.¹²⁵ Because police grids represent, for the most part, a smaller geographic area than a census tract, it would be more beneficial to look at crime throughout time using these police grids rather than using census tracts, for the measurement of crime would be more precise. However, there are two reasons why this is not possible: 1) Police grids were not established until the early 1970s, and I therefore would not be able to accurately study the change in crime from 1937 to 1971, and 2) Until very recently, population statistics were not collected at the police grid level, and therefore it would only be possible to look at the absolute change in crime over time, rather than the relative change in crime over time.

With this in mind, I converted the grid data I collected from the years 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 into census tract data. To do this, I overlaid the police grids with the St. Paul census tracts, and assigned grids to census tracts accordingly. In certain instances, the grids did not line up well with the smaller census tracts, and in these cases, I had to designate the census tract as having no data. Though this method has issues of accuracy and precision, I am still able to portray crime along University Avenue over time.

Finally, I created a series of choropleth maps that allow for visual representation of the data. Each map represents the occurrence of a specific crime during a specific year in time. The data have been normalized by population for each census tract. The final data shown on each map represent crime occurrences per capita; this allows for relative comparisons of crime across space and across time. Though census tracts are designed with the goal of representing a similar number of persons between each other, this does not always occur, and this is therefore a limitation to this method. Population data were

¹²⁵ For a reference of what police grids versus census tracts look like, see the Appendix.

found using the National Historical Geographic Information System created by the Minnesota Population Center at the University of Minnesota¹²⁶. For each sample year, I used the population data that corresponded with the decade in which the data were collected.¹²⁷ I have manually classed the data, and have converted the data into ordinal (ranked) data to allow for easier and quicker interpretation of the results. Within each map series, the data have been classed so that the ranks of low, medium-low, medium-high and high represent the same range of crime rates for each year.

As a final note, crime data is notoriously difficult to work with. Police departments have been struggling in their attempt to find the best method of portraying crime since they began compiling yearly statistics. Based on the available data, I felt that representing crime as a rate of the population was the best method for this particular study; however, I acknowledge that there is bias in the measurement process. This should be taken into consideration when analyzing the results of the study.

¹²⁶ Minnesota Population Center. *National Historical Geographic Information System: Pre-release Version 0.1*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2004.

¹²⁷ For 1937, I used population statistics from the year 1940.

CHAPTER X

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Each series of maps that follow show trends in the rate of a particular type of crime over time. Each map sequence will be accompanied by a brief explanation of crime trends in St. Paul in comparison to University Avenue, as well as a more in depth account of crime trends specifically along University. Analysis of the effects of transportation on these trends will follow in the next section.

I have made two reference maps of University Avenue to allow for a better understanding of the trends shown. Figure 1 shows major landmarks along University Avenue from 1900-1940, and Figure 2 shows major landmarks along University Avenue from 1950-2011. Landmarks on these maps will be referred to throughout the data analysis section.

Figure 1:

University Avenue, 1900 - 1940

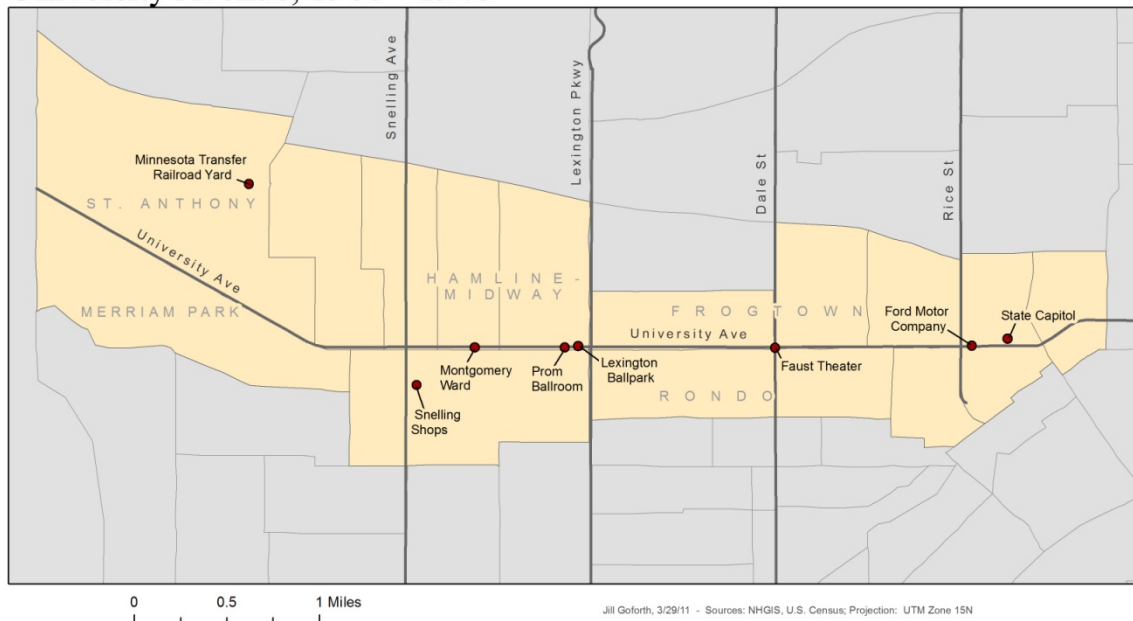
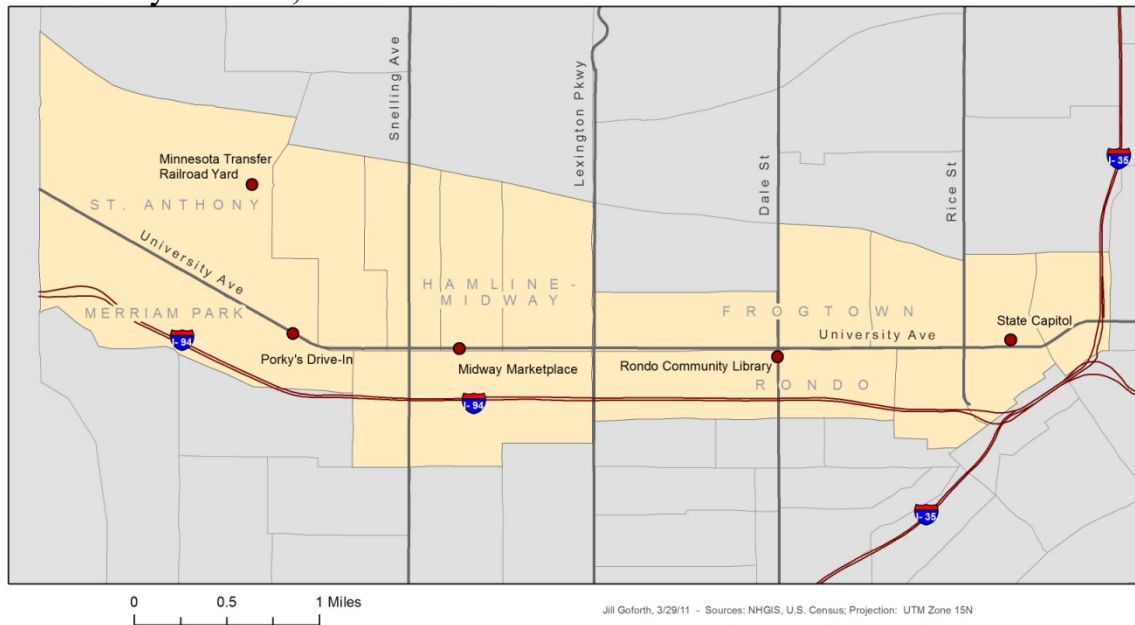


Figure 2:

University Avenue, 1950 - 2011



Map Series 1: Theft

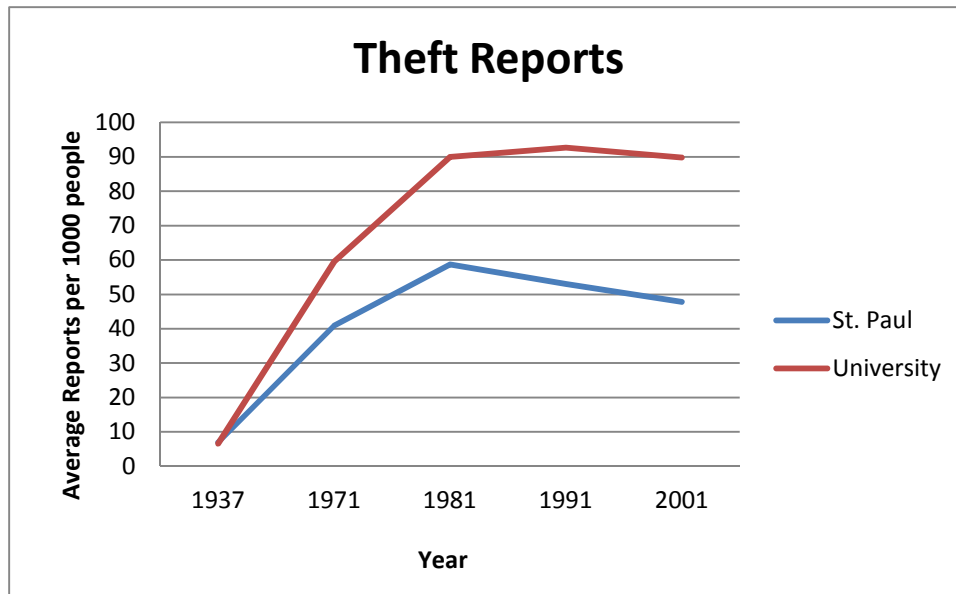
The Saint Paul Police Department defines theft as “the unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another.”¹²⁸

In comparison to St. Paul, University Avenue has consistently experienced a higher average rate of theft reports over time (see Figure 1). The year 1937 represents the only time when the theft rate was lower along University than in St. Paul; the rates were 6.6 and 6.9 respectively. In 1991, the average theft rate hit its peak on University Avenue, at 92.7 reports per every 1000 persons. Conversely, the average theft rate in St. Paul was 53 reports per every 1000 persons in 1991. In 2001, both University and St. Paul experienced a decline in the average theft rate; however, St. Paul’s rate decreased

¹²⁸ City of Saint Paul, “Definitions,” *Crime Statistics*, <http://www.stpaul.gov/index.aspx?NID=700> (2011).

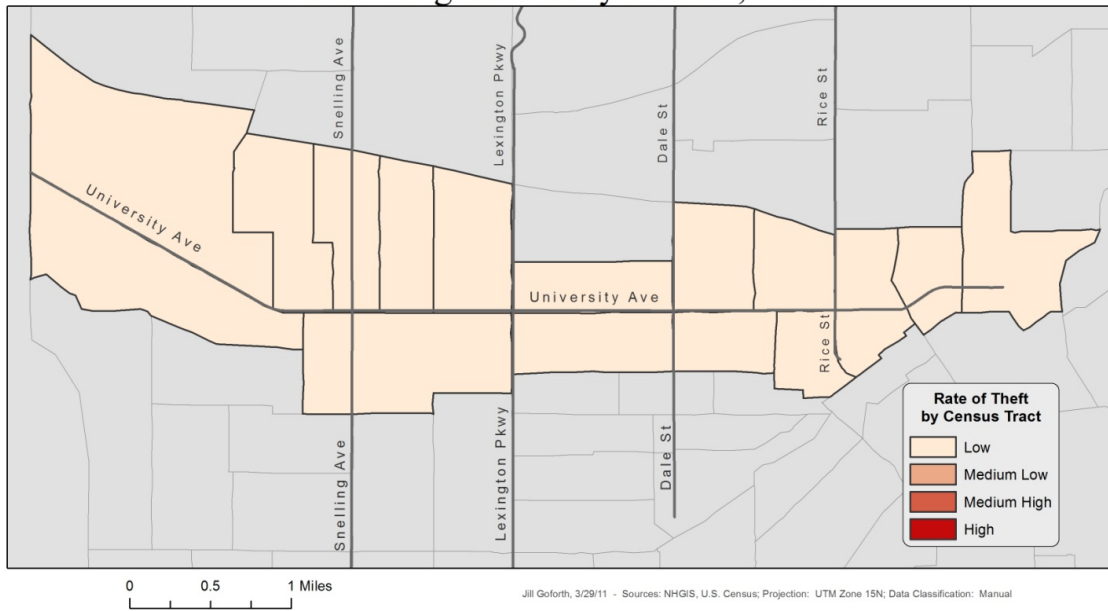
more, going from 53 to 47.8 reports per 1000 persons versus University's rate, which went from 92.7 to 89.8 reports per 1000 persons.

Figure 1:

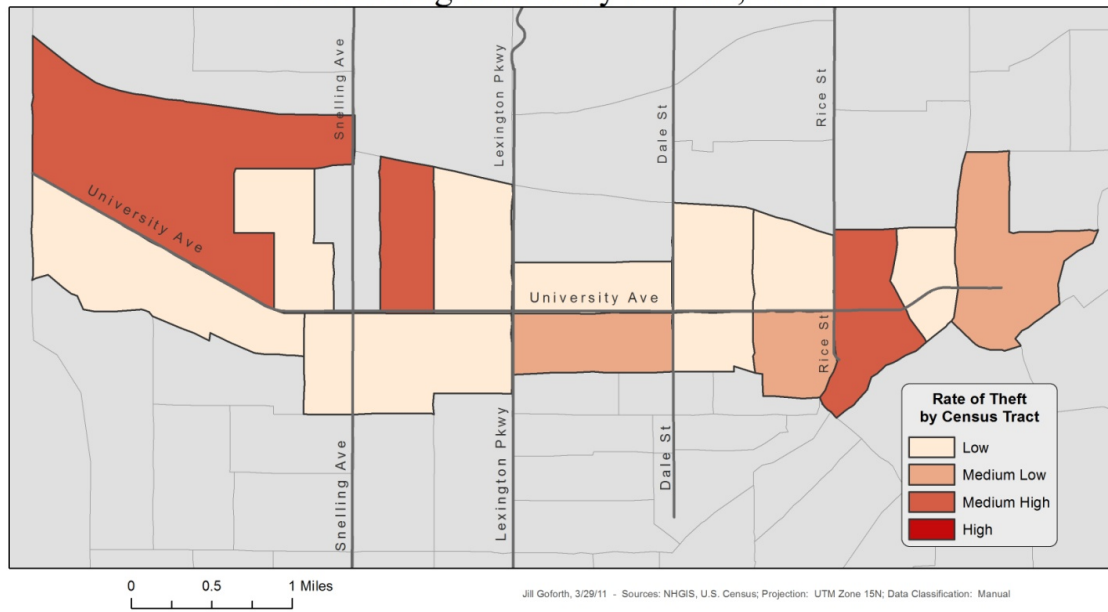


The rate of theft along University Avenue was lowest in 1937 and gradually increased over time. Theft was much more prevalent in 1971 than it was in 1937. The highest concentrations of occurrence were at the avenue's west end near the Minnesota Transfer Yards, as well at the avenue's far-east end near the State Capitol. From 1971 to 1981, the rate of theft increased in virtually every census tract along the avenue. Most notable was the increase in the theft rate from "low" to "high" in the census tracts surrounding the Snelling-University intersection. From 1981 to 1991, the theft rate remained the same in most of the census tracts along University. By 2001, many census tracts had fewer occurrences of theft; however, the census tracts surrounding the Snelling-University intersection remained high.

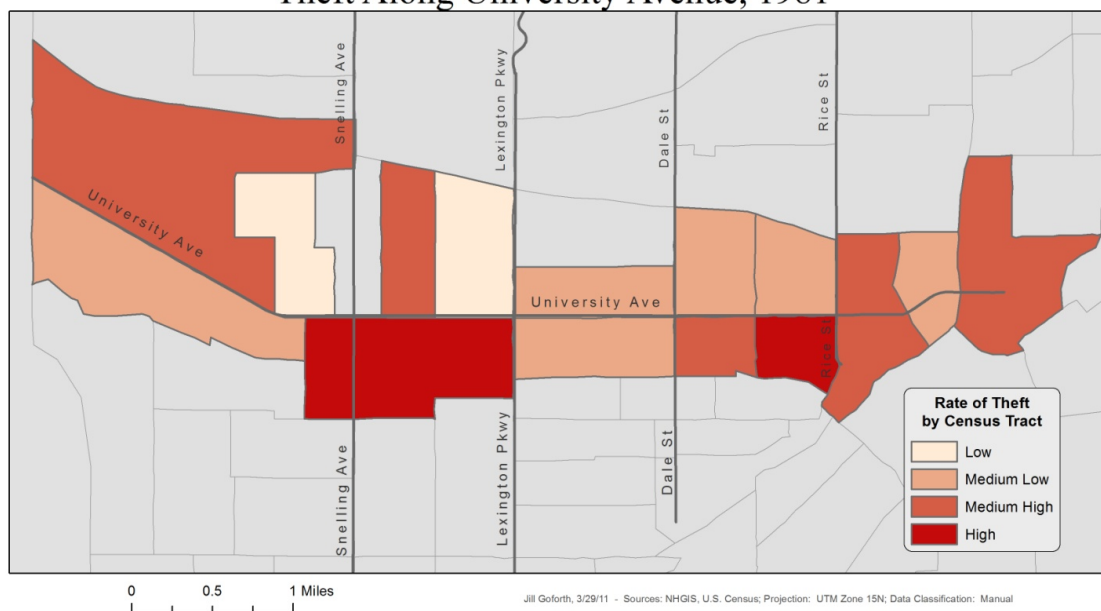
Theft Along University Avenue, 1937



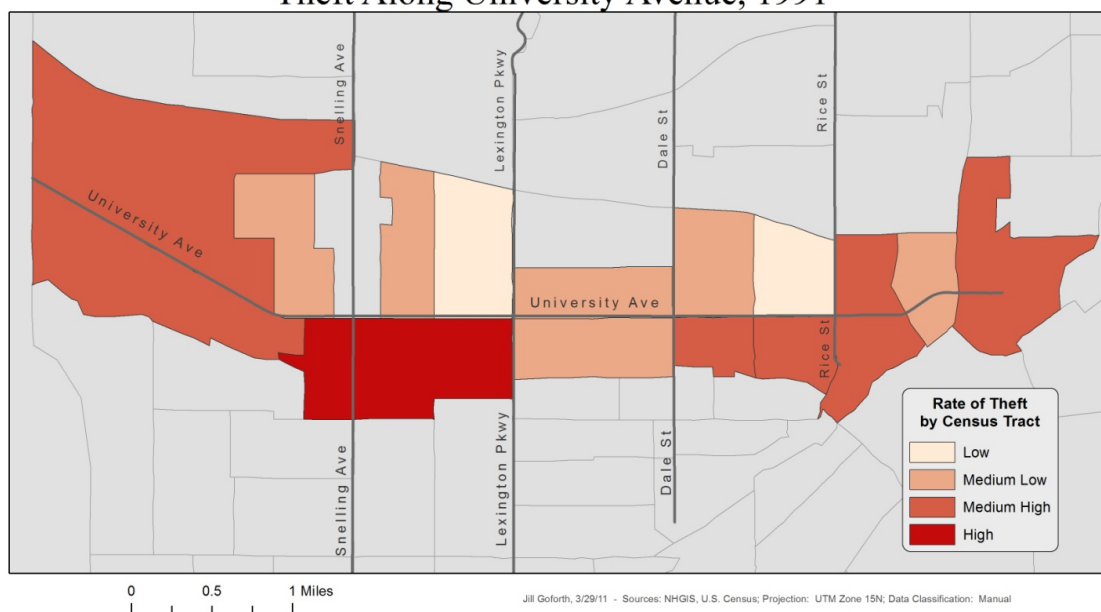
Theft Along University Avenue, 1971



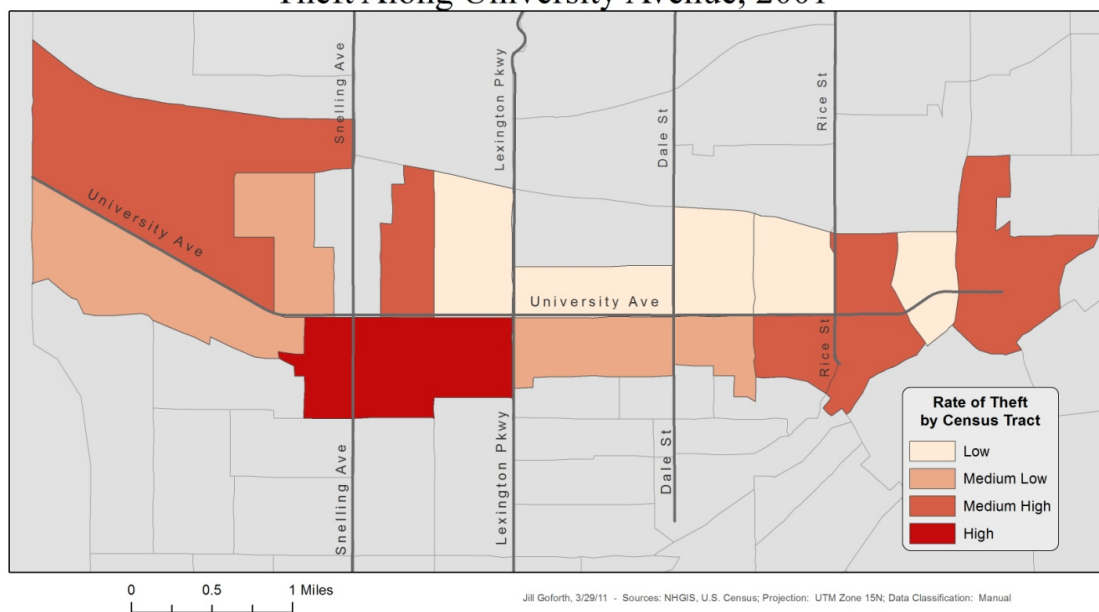
Theft Along University Avenue, 1981



Theft Along University Avenue, 1991



Theft Along University Avenue, 2001

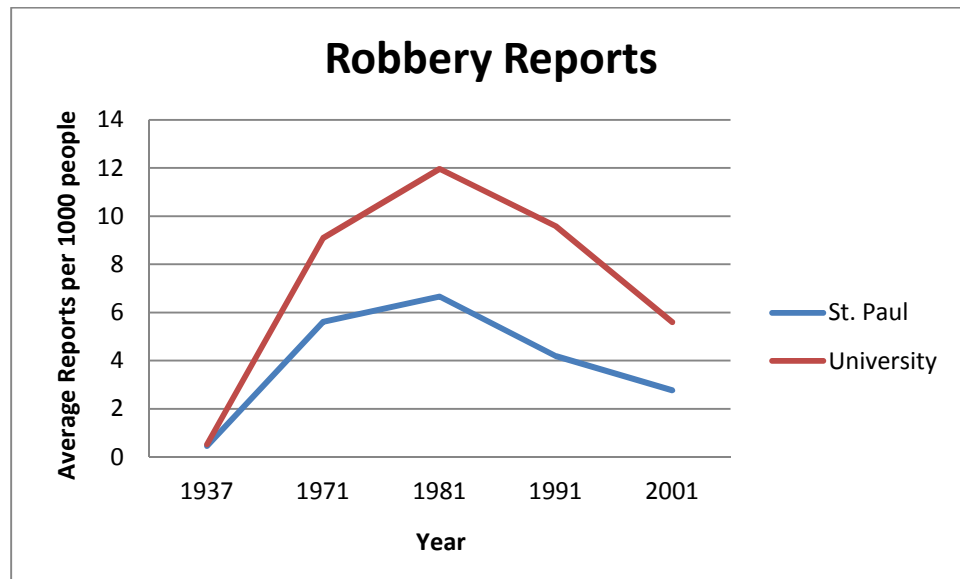


Map Series 2: Robbery

The Saint Paul Police Department defines robbery as “the taking or attempt to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force, threat of force or violence, or by putting the victim in fear.”¹²⁹

The average rate of robbery has consistently been higher along University Avenue than in St. Paul (see Figure 2). Both University Avenue and St. Paul hit their peak of average robbery reports in 1981. The average rate along University Avenue was 12 reports per 1000 persons, and the average rate in St. Paul was about 6.7 reports per 1000 persons. Since 1981, the average rate of robbery reports has declined; in 2001, St. Paul averaged 2.8 reports and University averaged 5.6 reports per 1000 persons.

Figure 2:

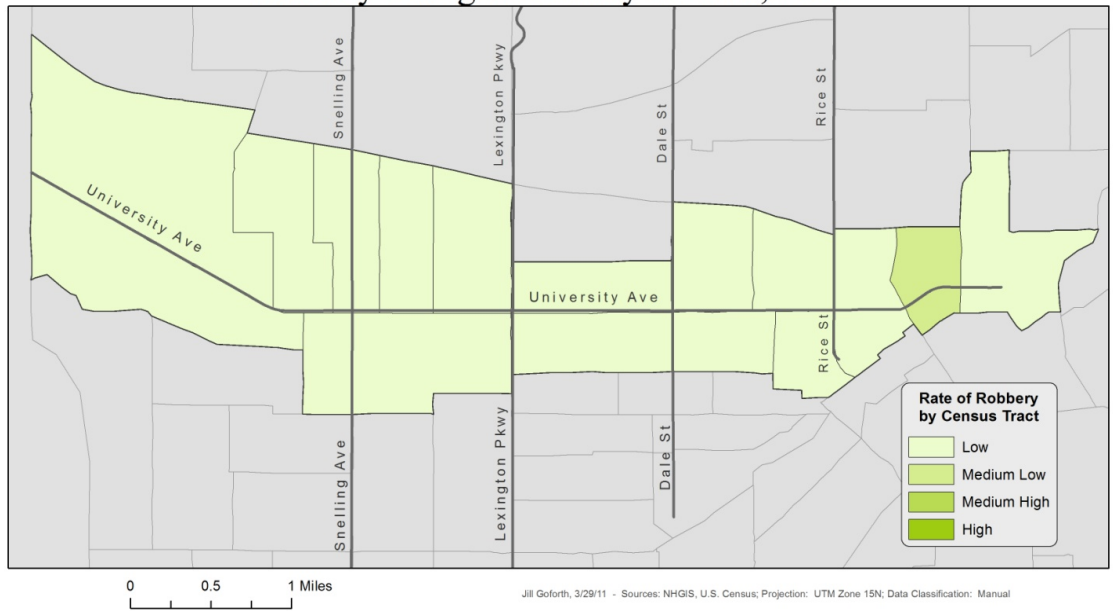


Occurrence of robbery along University Avenue was low in every census tract in 1937, with the exception of the census tract at the avenue’s far-east end near the state capitol. From 1937 to 1971, the rate of robbery increased in all but one census tract.

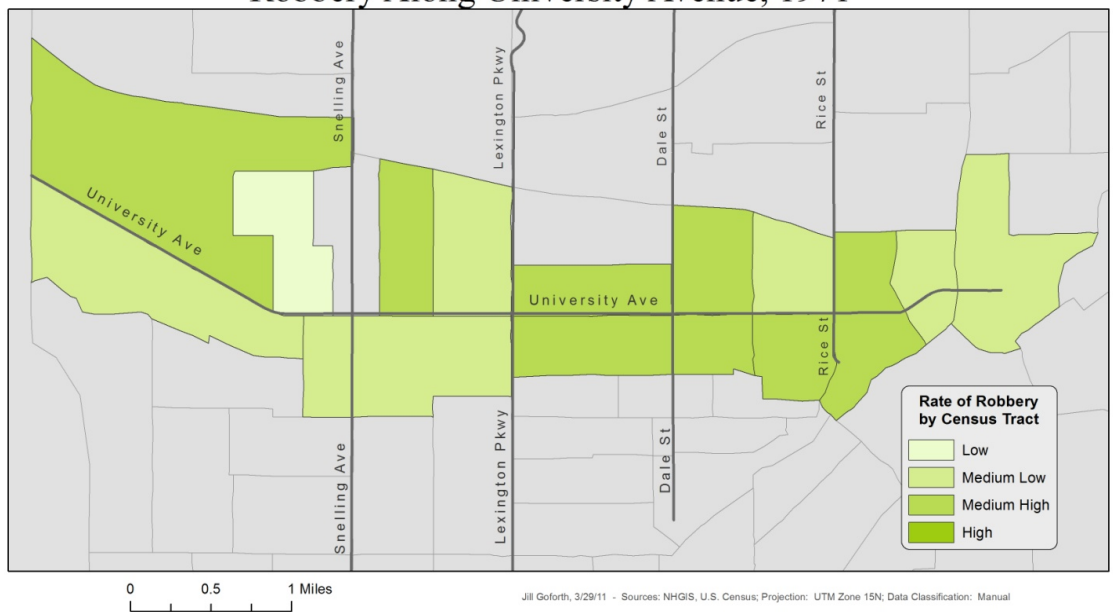
¹²⁹ City of Saint Paul

Incidents are more prevalent along the avenue's east end, especially around the intersections of Dale-University and Lexington-University. From 1971 to 1981, occurrences of robbery increased in the census tract at the intersection of Snelling and University Avenues, as well as in the census tract to the east of the Dale-University intersection; however, overall, robbery rates remained the same. From 1981 to 1991, incidents of robbery decreased slightly along the avenue, specifically at the intersection of Dale and University; however, overall, the rates remained mostly unchanged. Occurrences of robbery continued to decrease through the decade; in 2001, several census tracts on the avenue's east end saw fewer reports of robbery. However, robbery rates increased at and around the Snelling-University intersection as well as in the census tract from Lexington to Dale Street.

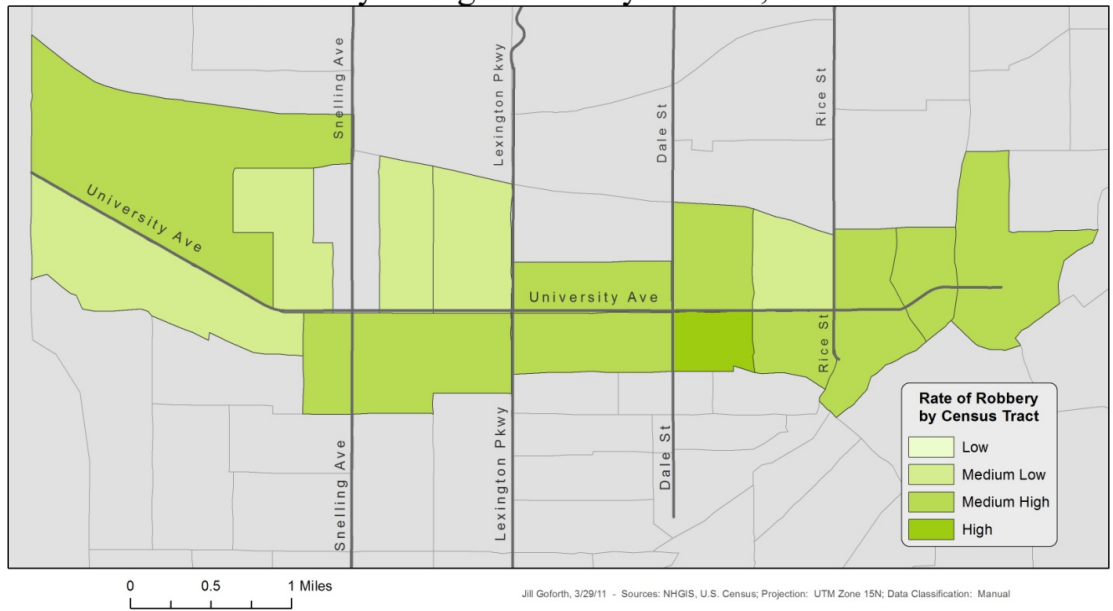
Robbery Along University Avenue, 1937



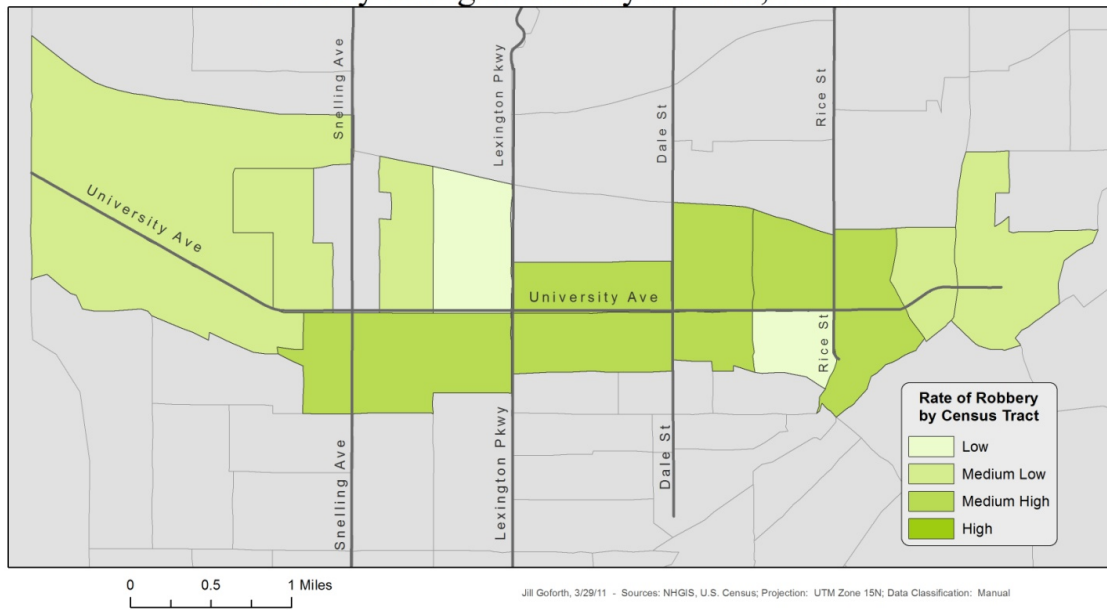
Robbery Along University Avenue, 1971



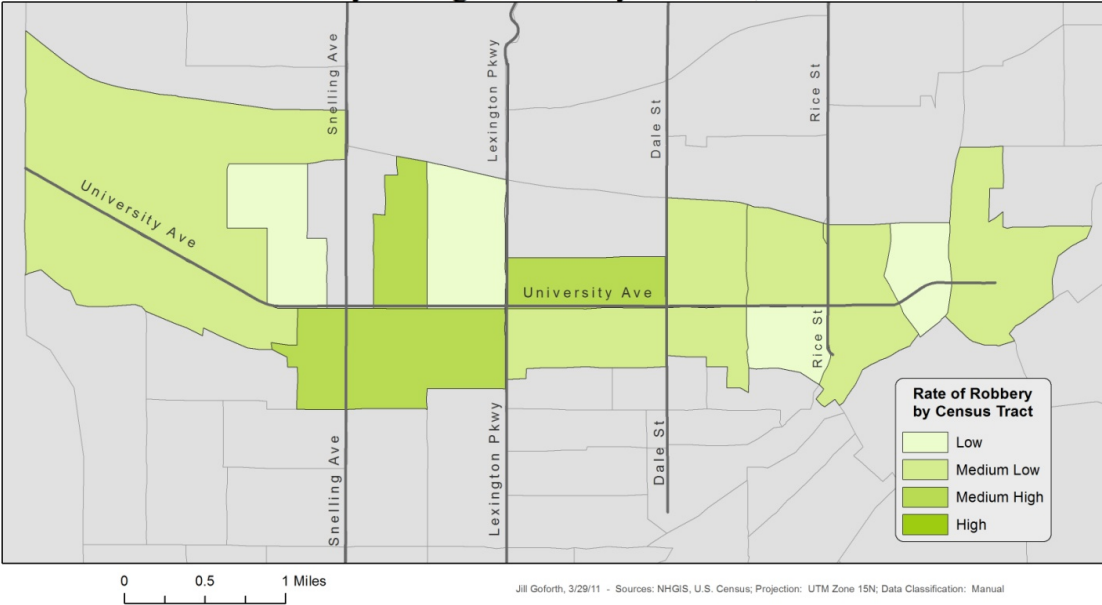
Robbery Along University Avenue, 1981



Robbery Along University Avenue, 1991



Robbery Along University Avenue, 2001

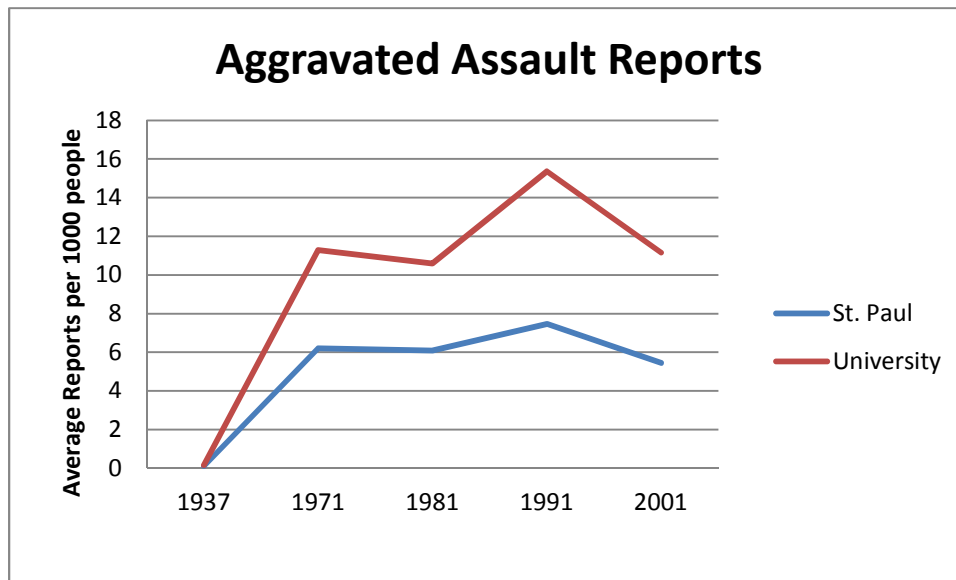


Map Series 3: Aggravated Assault

The Saint Paul Police Department defines aggravated assault as “an unlawful attack by one person, with use of a deadly weapon, upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury.”¹³⁰

Average reports of aggravated assault have been consistently higher along University Avenue in comparison to St. Paul (see Figure 3). From 1937 to 1971, the average aggravated assault rate spiked for both St. Paul and University. In St. Paul, the average rate went from 0.1 reports to 6.2 reports per 1000 persons, and along University Avenue, the average rate went from 0.2 reports to 11.3 reports per 1000 persons. Both St. Paul and University experienced their peak in aggravated assault reports in 1991, the rates were 7.5 and 15.4 respectively.

Figure 3:

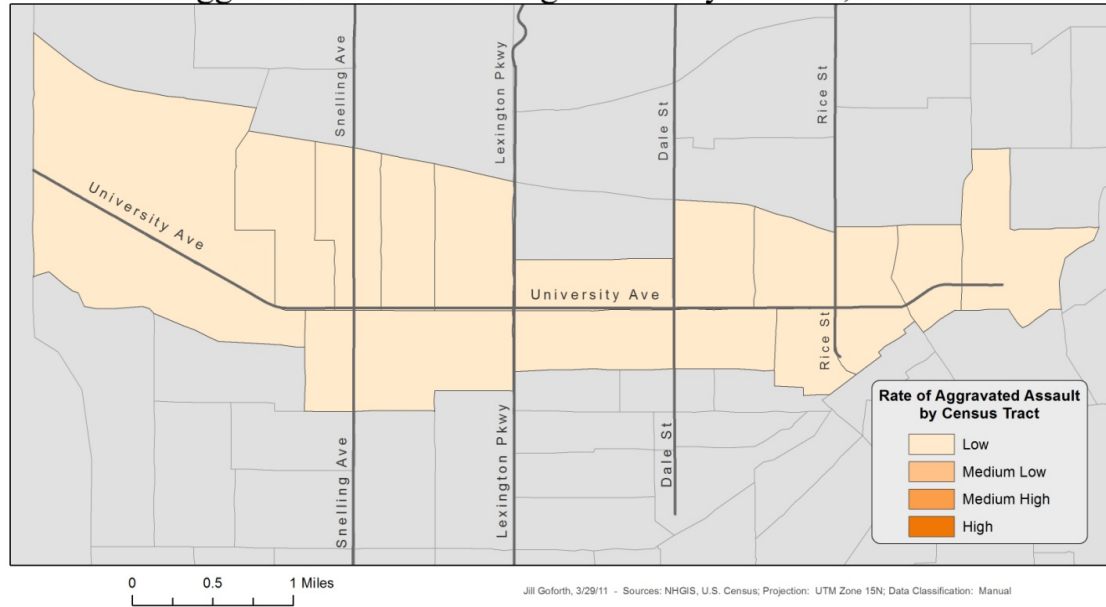


In 1937, occurrences of aggravated assault were low in every University Avenue census tract. By 1971, reports of aggravated assault were much more prevalent,

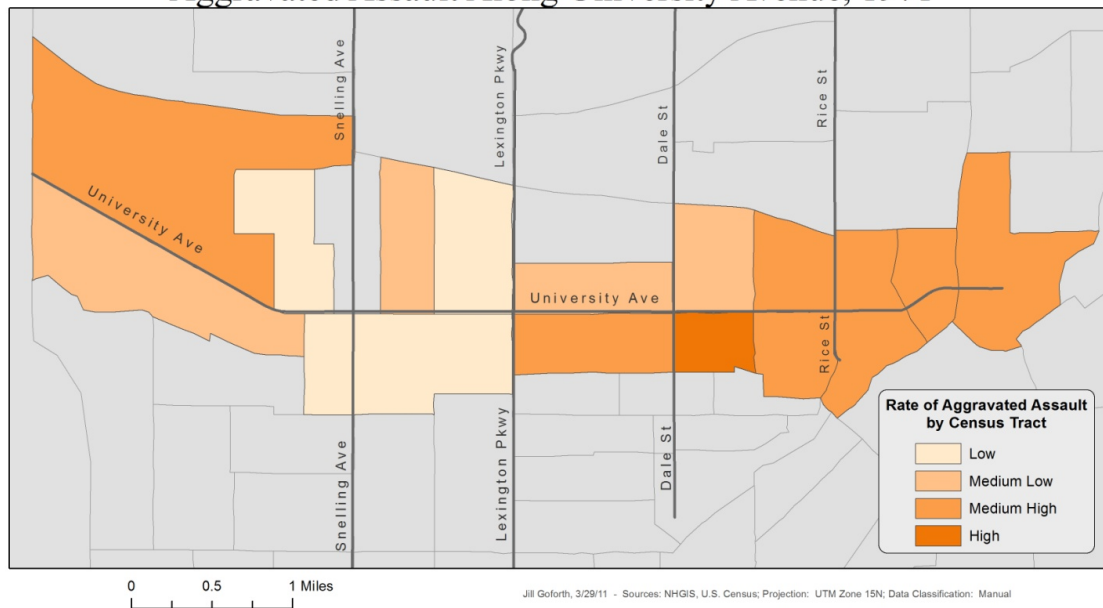
¹³⁰ City of Saint Paul

especially along the avenue's east end. The highest concentration of crime was in the census tract directly to the east of the University-Dale intersection. Additionally, the rate of aggravated assault was relatively high at the west end of the avenue, in the census tract that encompasses the Minnesota Transfer Yards. The year 1981 showed a similar pattern of aggravated assault occurrences; the highest concentrations of reports remained at the east end of University. However, there were fewer occurrences in the census tract at the avenue's west end and more occurrences in the census tract at the intersection of University and Snelling Avenues. In 1991, the rate of aggravated assault either remained the same or increased in all but one census tract. The highest concentrations of occurrences were at or around the University-Dale and University-Lexington intersections. Overall, the rate of aggravated assault declined from 1991 to 2001. However, occurrences did increase in the census tract at the avenue's far-east end, as well as in the census tract at the avenue's far west end.

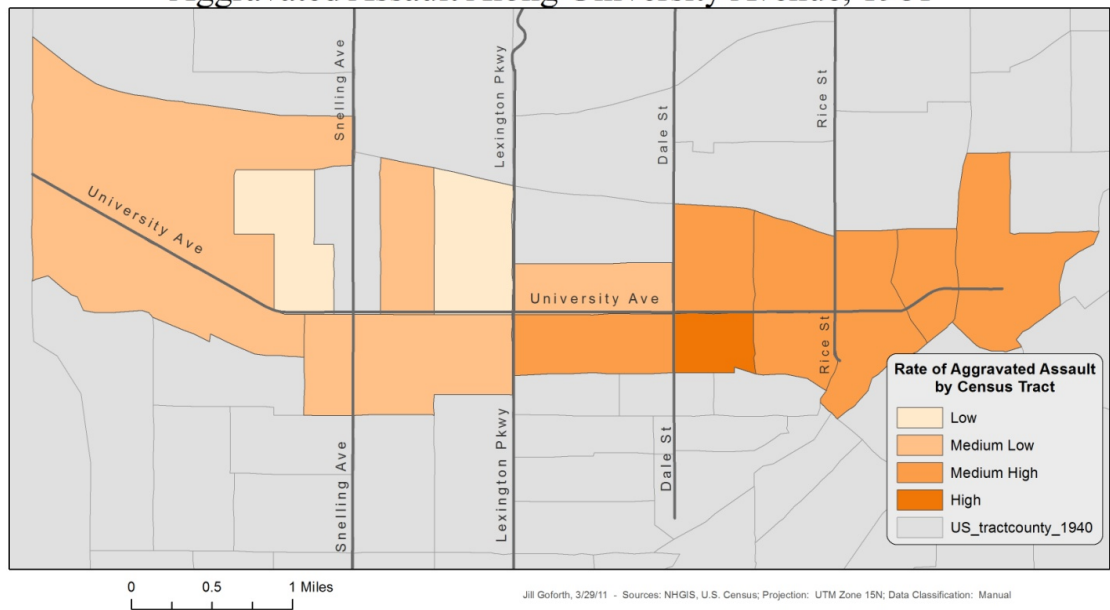
Aggravated Assault Along University Avenue, 1937



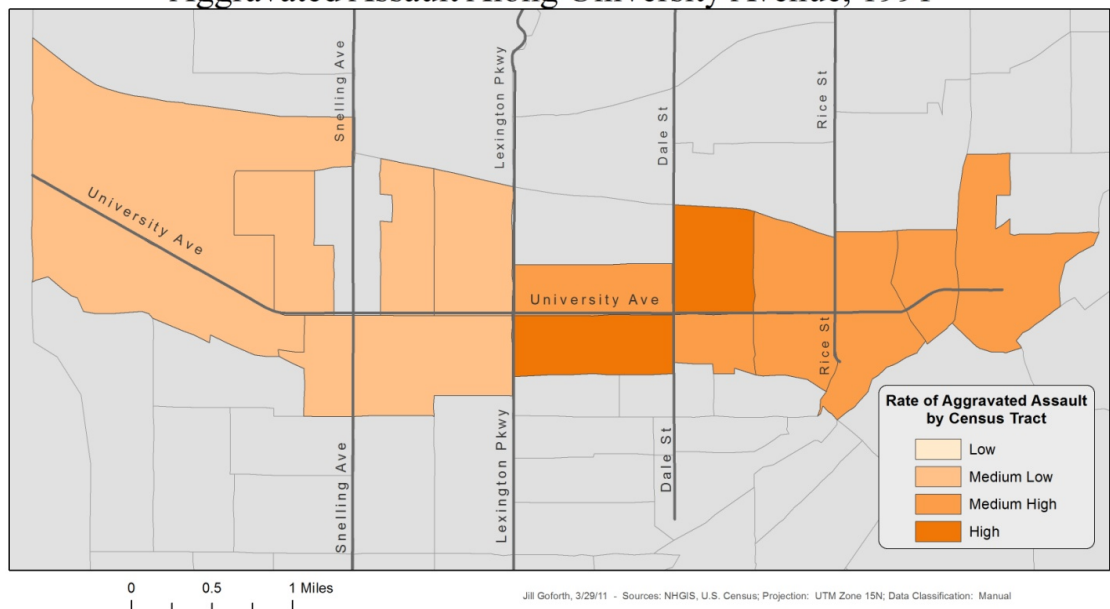
Aggravated Assault Along University Avenue, 1971



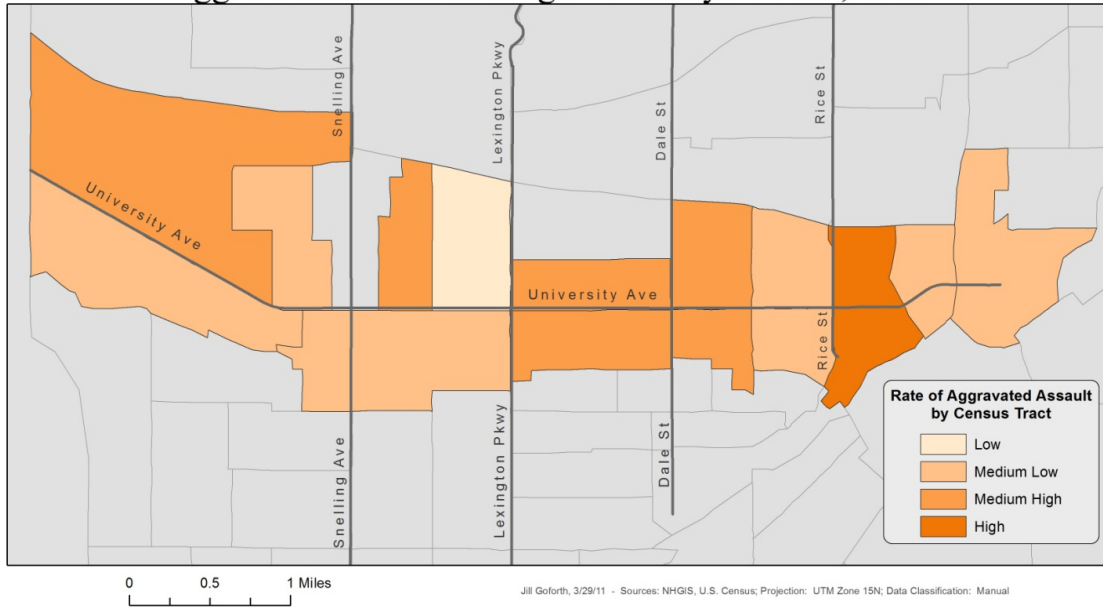
Aggravated Assault Along University Avenue, 1981



Aggravated Assault Along University Avenue, 1991



Aggravated Assault Along University Avenue, 2001

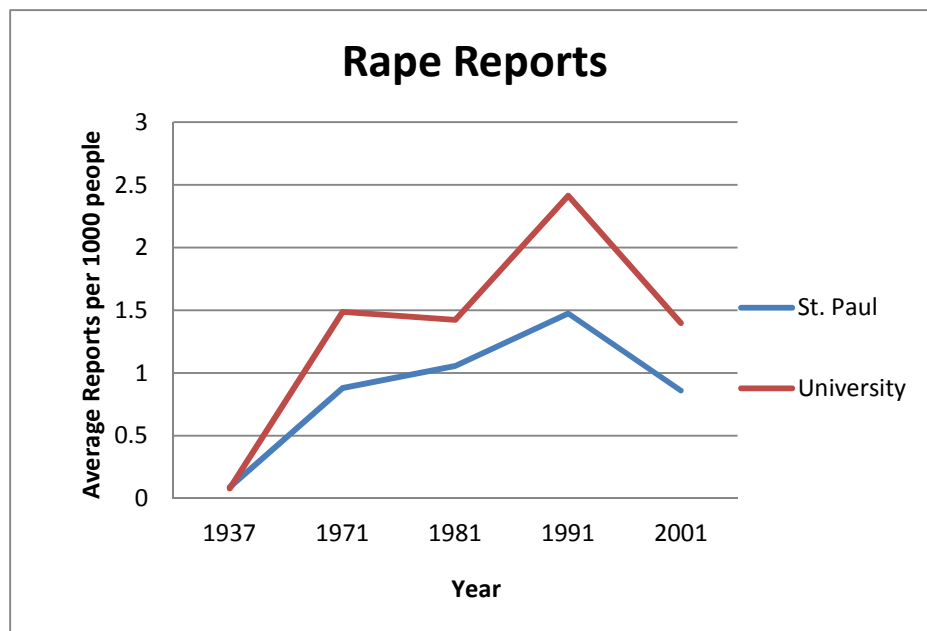


Map Series 4: Rape

The Saint Paul Police Department defines rape as “the carnal knowledge, assault, or attempted rape of a person forcibly.”¹³¹

In comparison to St. Paul, University Avenue has experienced a slightly higher rate of rape reports over time (see Figure 4). However, from 1971 to 1981, St. Paul experienced an increase in average reports of rape while University Avenue experienced a slight decrease in average rape reports. Both University and St. Paul hit a peak of rape reports in 1991; the rates were 2.4 and 1.5 respectively. From 1991 to 2001, both University and St. Paul have experienced an overall decline in the number of reports of rape.

Figure 4:

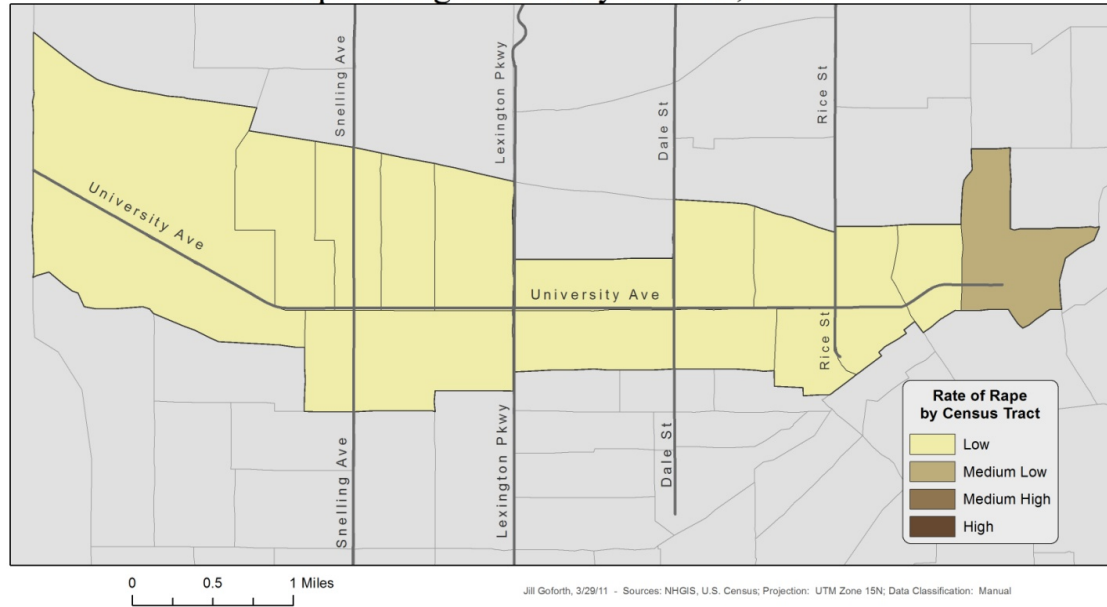


Incidents of rape along University Avenue were lowest in 1937 and highest in 1991. From 1937 to 1971, the rate of rape increased in virtually every census tract. Occurrences were highest in the two census tracts directly to the east of the University-

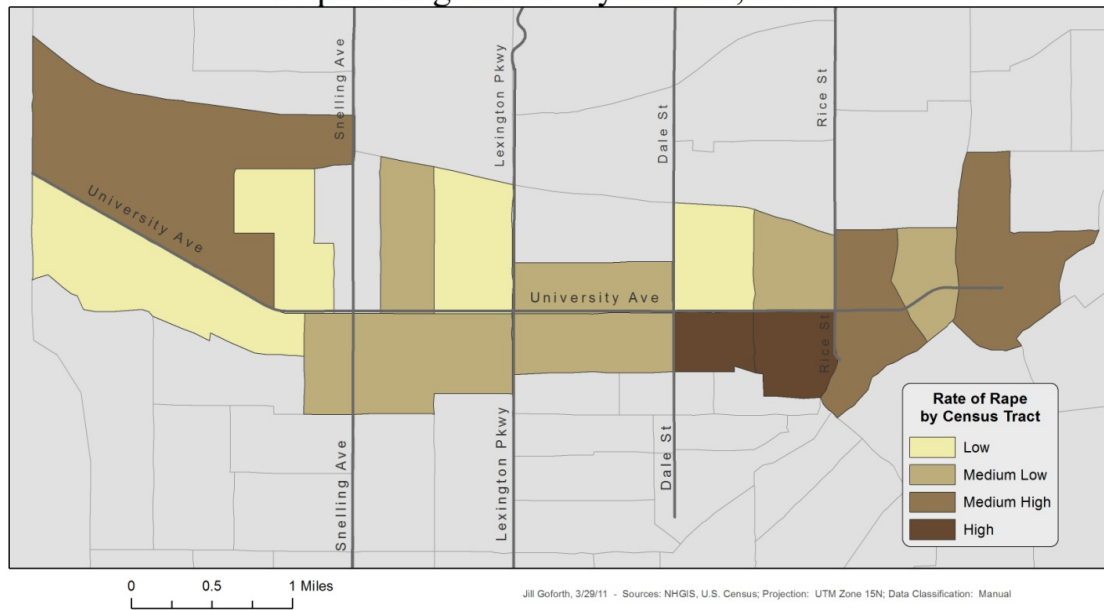
¹³¹ City of Saint Paul

Dale intersection. By 1981, the rate of rape had decreased slightly in these two census tracts; however, the census tract at the northeast edge of Dale and University saw an increase in the rate of rape. From 1981 to 1991, occurrences of rape increased, especially at the east end of the avenue. Reports of rape were particularly high near the intersection of Dale and University as well as near the state capitol at the far-east end of University Avenue. By 2001, incidents of rape had declined along the avenue as a whole; all of the census tracts at the east end of the avenue went from having “high” rape rates to having “low” or “medium-low” rape rates. Reports of rape did increase from 1991 to 2001 in the census tracts surrounding the University-Snelling intersection.

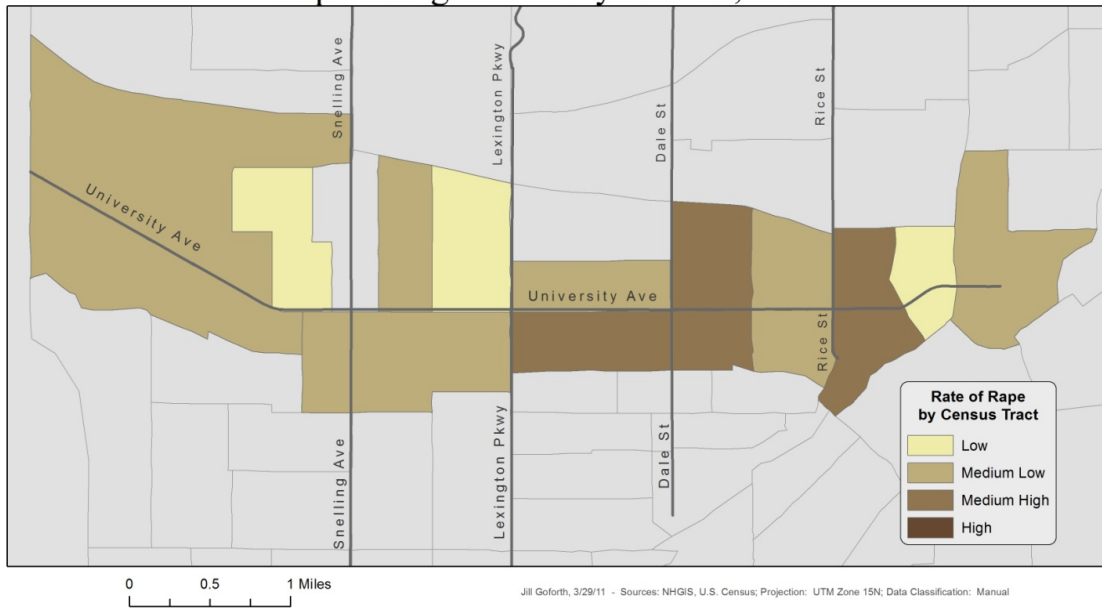
Rape Along University Avenue, 1937



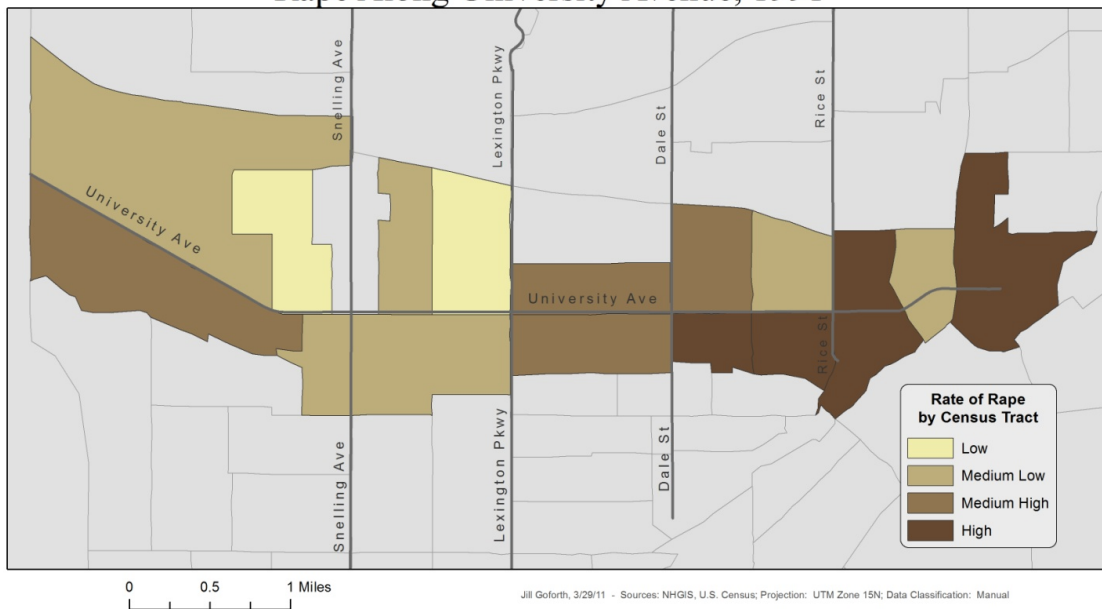
Rape Along University Avenue, 1971



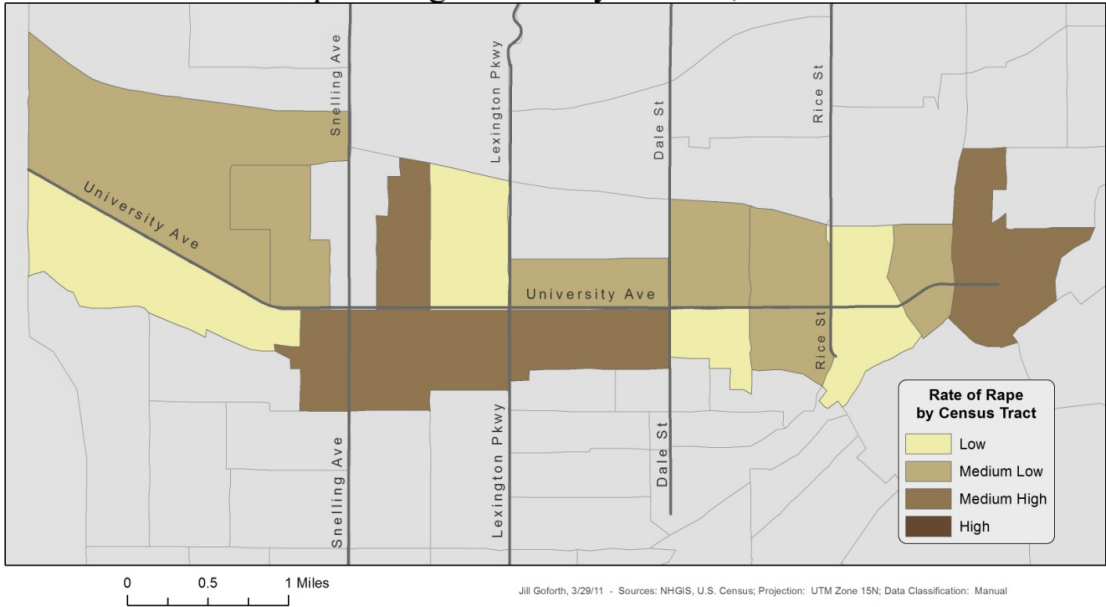
Rape Along University Avenue, 1981



Rape Along University Avenue, 1991



Rape Along University Avenue, 2001

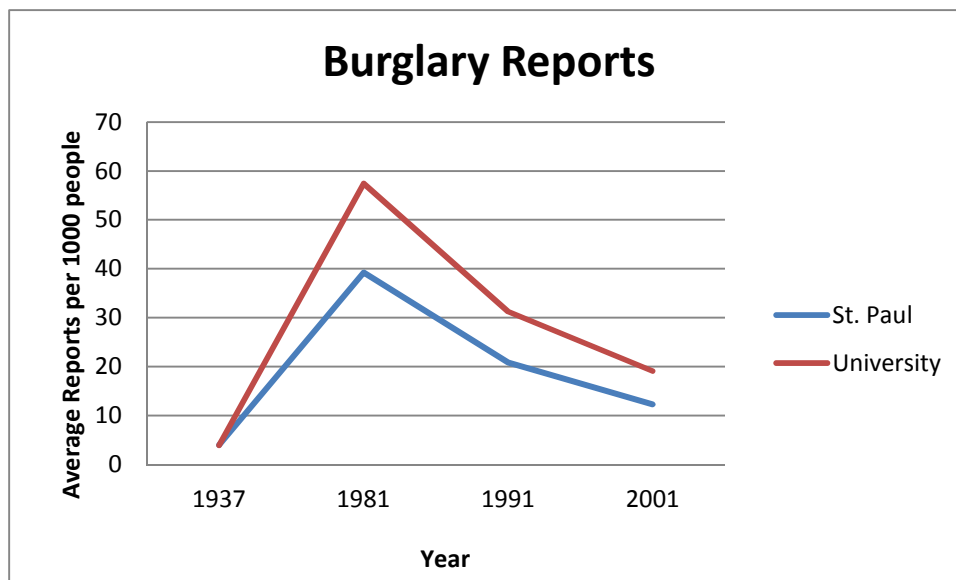


Map Series 5: Burglary¹³²

The Saint Paul Police Department defines burglary as “the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft.”¹³³

With the exception of 1937, University Avenue has experienced a higher average rate of burglary reports over time (see Figure 5). Both University and St. Paul hit their peak number of burglary reports in 1981. The average rate along University Avenue was 57.4, and the average rate in St. Paul was 39.3 burglary reports per 1000 persons. Since 1981, the average rate of burglary has decreased dramatically. In 2001, the rate on University was 19.1 reports per 1000 persons, and the rate in St. Paul was 12.3 reports per 1000 persons.

Figure 5:



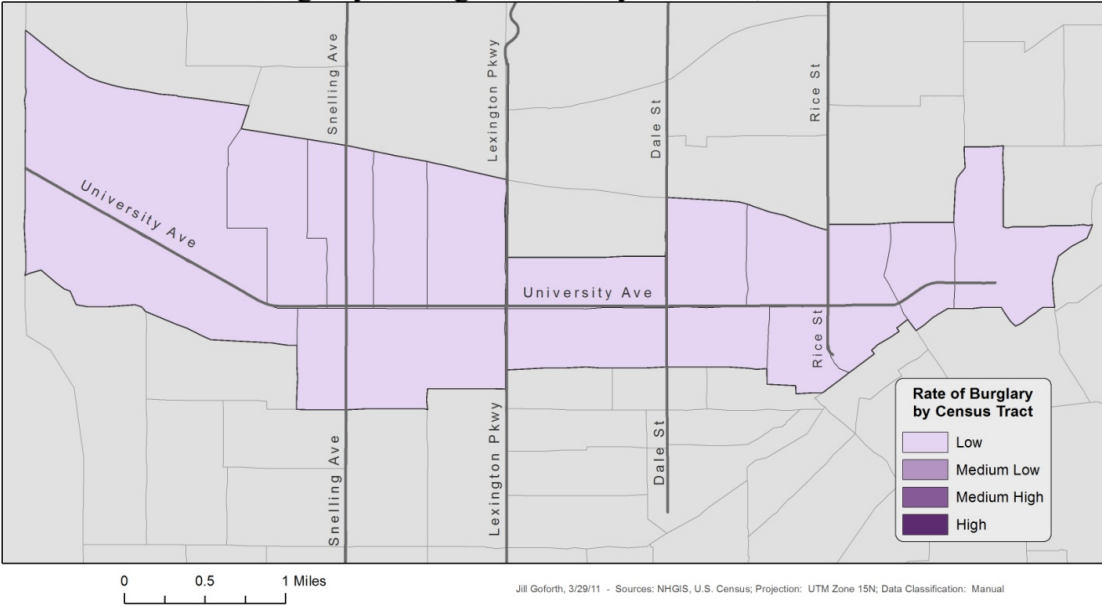
The occurrence of burglary along University Avenue was lowest in 1937 and hit its peak in 1981. The difference in rates of burglary between 1937 and 1981 is significant. In 1937 incidences of burglary were low in every census tract; by 1981, the

¹³² Data on burglary were not included in the police report for 1971.

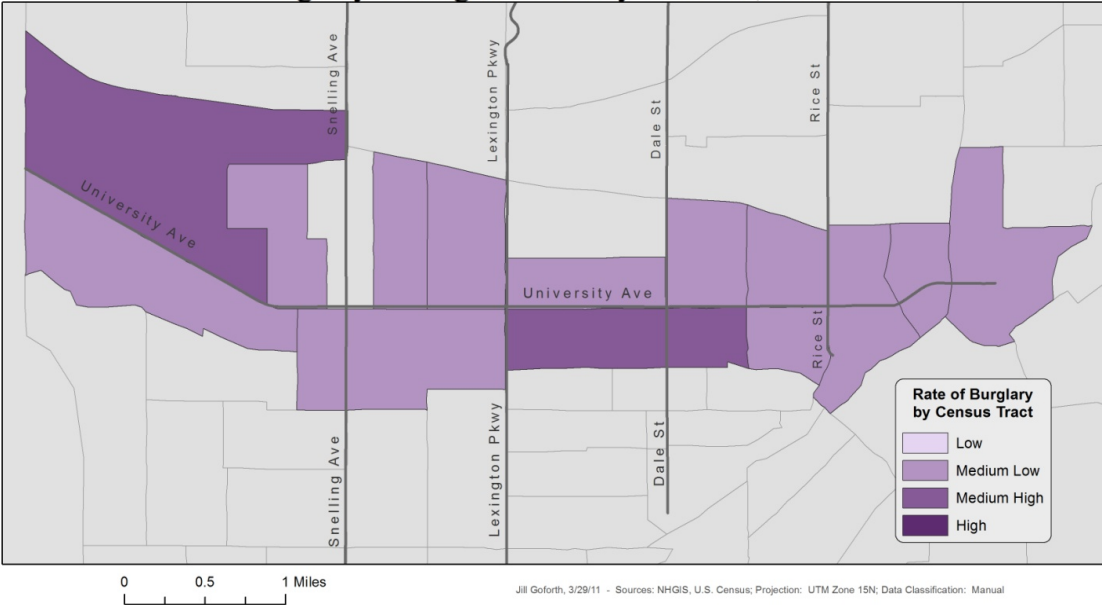
¹³³ City of Saint Paul

rate of burglary increased in all but one census tract. For the most part, occurrences were spread out evenly across the avenue; however, there was a higher concentration of burglary in the census tracts from Lexington Avenue to Dale Street, as well as in the census tract at the avenue's far-west end. By 1991, the rate of burglary had declined in many of the census tracts along University. Furthermore, incidents of burglary were low in all of the census tracts at the avenue's far-east end. The rate of burglary continued to decline throughout the decade. In 2001, every University Avenue census tract had low rates of burglary, with the exception of the census tract at the avenue's far-west end.

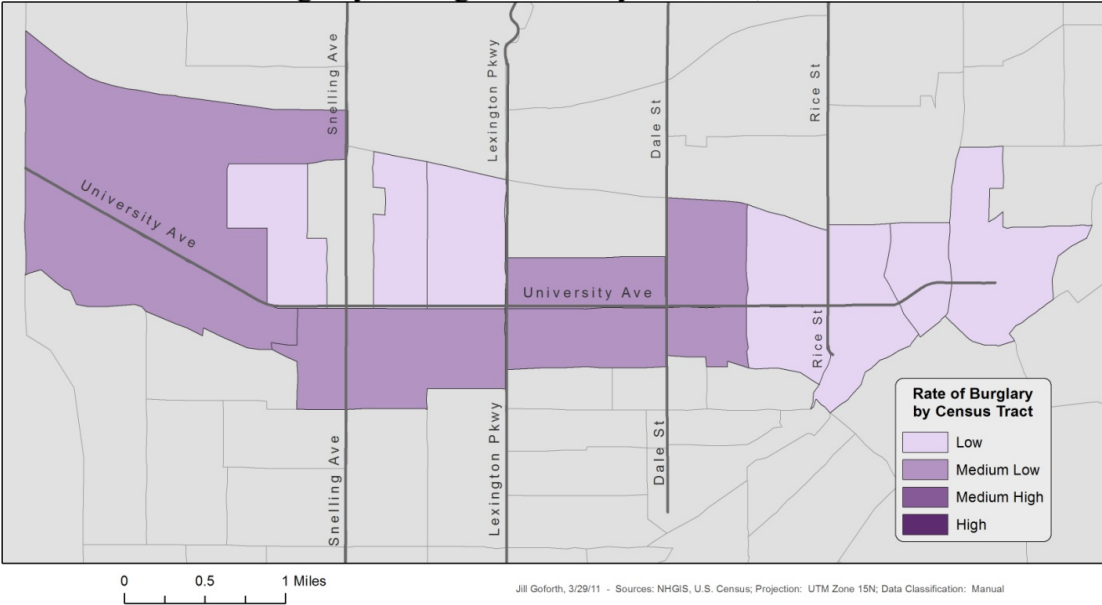
Burglary Along University Avenue, 1937



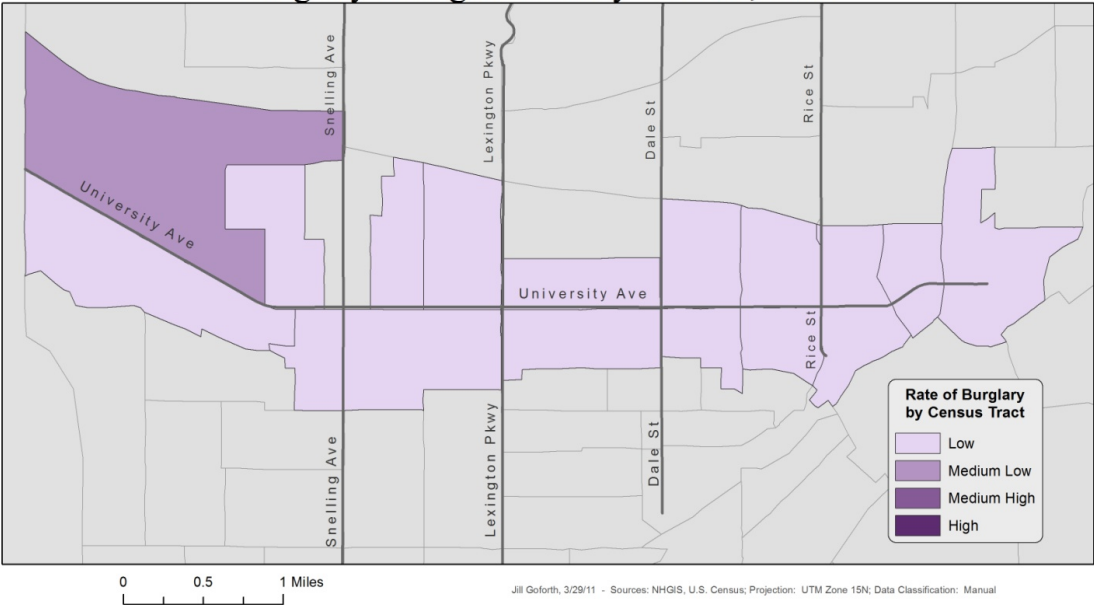
Burglary Along University Avenue, 1981



Burglary Along University Avenue, 1991



Burglary Along University Avenue, 2001



CHAPTER XI

INTERPRETATIONS AND RESULTS

Considering the history of University Avenue, as well as the theories of crime prevention through environmental design, one would expect crime along University Avenue to follow a particular trend. If the theories hold true, then in 1937, one should see relatively low levels of crime. Though the automobile was in use at this time, the streetcars were still a competitive form of transportation. Additionally, the avenue was thriving at the time. The Snelling Streetcar shops provided work for hundreds of people during the day, and the Lexington Ballpark, Montgomery Ward and various restaurants and bars provided entertainment during the evening. The mixed-use, human-scaled development pattern, as well as the numerous activities that allowed for unconscious surveillance of the street should have caused crime rates to be low, and in fact, rates were low. All types of crime rates were significantly lower in 1937 than in 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001.

The occurrence of crime is expected to increase from 1937 to 1971. Interstate-94, which was completed in 1967, caused fewer people to visit the avenue; in just one year after construction, the traffic volume along University was reduced by 10,000 vehicles per day. Additionally, the avenue's built environment had come to reflect the now ubiquitous automobile; the Midway Shopping Center opened in 1954, and the Lexington ballpark was demolished in 1958 to make way for a strip mall. These events decreased the ability for natural surveillance to occur. Not only were there fewer "eyes on the street" in 1971 in comparison to 1937, but also, the large surface parking lots that came to

dominate the landscape made it more difficult for storeowners, shoppers and residents to keep a watchful eye on the activities occurring on the sidewalks. In fact, the rate of crime along the avenue increased significantly from 1937 to 1971, especially at the east end of the avenue and at the Lexington Avenue shopping center.

From 1971 to 1981, the rate of crime is also expected to have increased, because the street gained a reputation of which contributed to undesirable activities and behaviors. The Faust Theater, located at the southwest corner of Dale and University, began showing X-rated films in 1974, and became the anchor of a sex district that lasted through the 1980s. Though this district may have added eyes to the street, I argue that the activities it encouraged produced negative “signals” that, according to the theory of Wilson and Kelling, contributed to unwanted behavior. The analysis of the crime maps suggests that the occurrence of crime did increase from 1971 to 1981, with the exception of rape. Specifically, crime became more prevalent around the Snelling-University intersection near the Midway Shopping Center and at the east end of the avenue around the sex district.

The year 1991 represents the beginning of both grassroots and organized revitalization efforts along University Avenue. Crime rates are therefore expected to be lower in 1991 with respect to 1981 because these efforts allowed both residents and visitors to realize that there was a sense of ownership and concern for the avenue. The efforts began when the City of St. Paul condemned the Faust Theater in 1989, sending a message that this type of behavior was not acceptable. Furthermore, several not-for-profits had sprung up with the goal of changing the image of the street. University UNITED was formed in 1981, and in 1989, began funding streetscape and façade

improvements for businesses along the avenue. These efforts allowed for business owners to keep the area better maintained and for visitors to see that both the city and the University Avenue community cared about creating a better image for the street. Lastly, from 1980 to 1990, the Southeast Asian population of the avenue more than tripled. In 1980, there were 1,263 Asians present along the avenue; by 1990 that number had jumped to 5,413. The presence of this community improved the economic health of the avenue, and gave people a unique reason to visit the avenue, thus adding to the number of eyes on the street. In actuality, the change in crime rates from 1981 to 1991 had mixed results. From 1981 to 1991, occurrences of robbery, theft and burglary decreased; however, occurrences of rape and aggravated assault increased. Interestingly, incidents of rape and aggravated assault increased in the census tracts around the sex district, but incidents of robbery, burglary and theft decreased in this area. Also notable is the fact that rates did not decrease near the Midway Shopping Center for any type of crime.

Finally, one would expect crime rates to continue to decline from 1991 to 2001, because more revitalization efforts had surfaced throughout the decade. Specifically, University UNITED organized several task forces on issues related to crime prevention. The efforts led to the creation of the Empowerment of New American Business Leaders (ENABLE), which won national recognition as a model of community-oriented policing.¹³⁴ Furthermore, in 1997 UNITED helped to establish the “Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) STAR Program. The program was awarded \$300,000 in City STAR monies to help University Avenue businesses make exterior

¹³⁴ Universtiy UNITED.

improvements consistent with CPTED principles.¹³⁵ This focus on the built environment to alter behavior should have had an effect on crime levels along University, and it did. From 1991 to 2001 overall crime rates decreased for every type of crime. However, crime rates actually increased around the intersection of Snelling and University Avenues for rape and remained at its high level for theft and robbery in this area.

The results of this study reveal several trends. First, actual rates of occurrences of crime have, in fact, increased over time. After 1971, crime rates fluctuated; however, the low levels of crime that were observed in 1937 have yet to be experienced again. Furthermore, though crime rates have decreased overall from 1971 to 2001, they remain high in the areas of University that are particularly known for their automobile-oriented design features, namely, near the Midway Shopping Center.

¹³⁵ University UNITED.

PART III: CONCLUSION

CHAPTER XII

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR UNIVERSITY AVENUE?

The Central Corridor light rail development in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota will have lasting effects on the activities and urban form of University Avenue. In fact, the avenue has already begun to rid itself of its automobile-oriented identity. The iconic Porky's drive-in closed its doors in April 2011, just one month after the onset of light rail construction. The owner stated in an interview that the decision to sell was not based on a loss in revenues, but instead was due to the light rail line: "[The light rail] is going to ruin the avenue, and I'm sure there isn't going to be any parking".¹³⁶ Porky's will soon become an extension of the Episcopal Homes, a senior housing development that currently neighbors the drive-in.

The closing of this legendary St. Paul business perhaps marks the end of the University Avenue automobile era and the start of an era of walkability, public transit, and intentional design of the built environment. Though the comment of the Porky's owner makes it apparent that the Central Corridor light rail development is still a contested topic, I believe that it will only be a matter of time before residents and business owners realize that the project has the potential to bring positive change to the avenue.

This paper explored the relationship among transportation characteristics, urban form and rates of crime along University Avenue. Part I considered the various ways in

¹³⁶ Paul Walsh and Rochelle Olson, "Porky's closing: That's all, folks," *Star Tribune*, <http://www.startribune.com/local/119000504.html> (April 4, 2011).

which transportation innovations and mobility preferences have affected the activities and the built environment of this urban street. In fact, University has been greatly influenced by changes in transportation characteristics. The interurban streetcar line contributed to early commercial development and residential settlement, and the later proliferation of American car culture contributed to the automobile-oriented streetscape that dominates University Avenue today. In Part II, the effect the built environment has on behavior was explored. A spatial and temporal analysis of University Avenue crime rates revealed that the rate of crime has increased over time, specifically in areas of University that are dominated by an automobile-oriented streetscape. This conclusion was consistent with theories of crime prevention through environmental design, which argue that spaces should be built with the goal of encouraging natural surveillance and territoriality. Because automobile-oriented design is characterized by low-density development and wide-open and unmonitored spaces, surveillance of the street is difficult. Furthermore, various activities that can be either directly or indirectly related to changes in transportation have contributed to lack of territoriality, or a sense of ownership or care for the avenue as a whole.

One of the claims of the Central Corridor light rail project is that it is just as much—if not more—about economic development and neighborhood revitalization as it is about moving people. Thus, the corridor will not only see the construction of light rail transit, but will also incorporate dense, mixed-use development that encourages walking, as well as public art, street trees, benches and streetlights to create a more visually stimulating and accessible environment. My findings have shown that overall crime rates have increased along University Avenue over time and that the automobile-oriented

streetscape that has come to dominate the avenue has contributed to this overall decline in safety. Thus, if the city follows through with its current development plans, then University Avenue should see an improvement in safety in the years following construction of the light rail transit line.

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APPENDIX

Figure 1: Police Grids

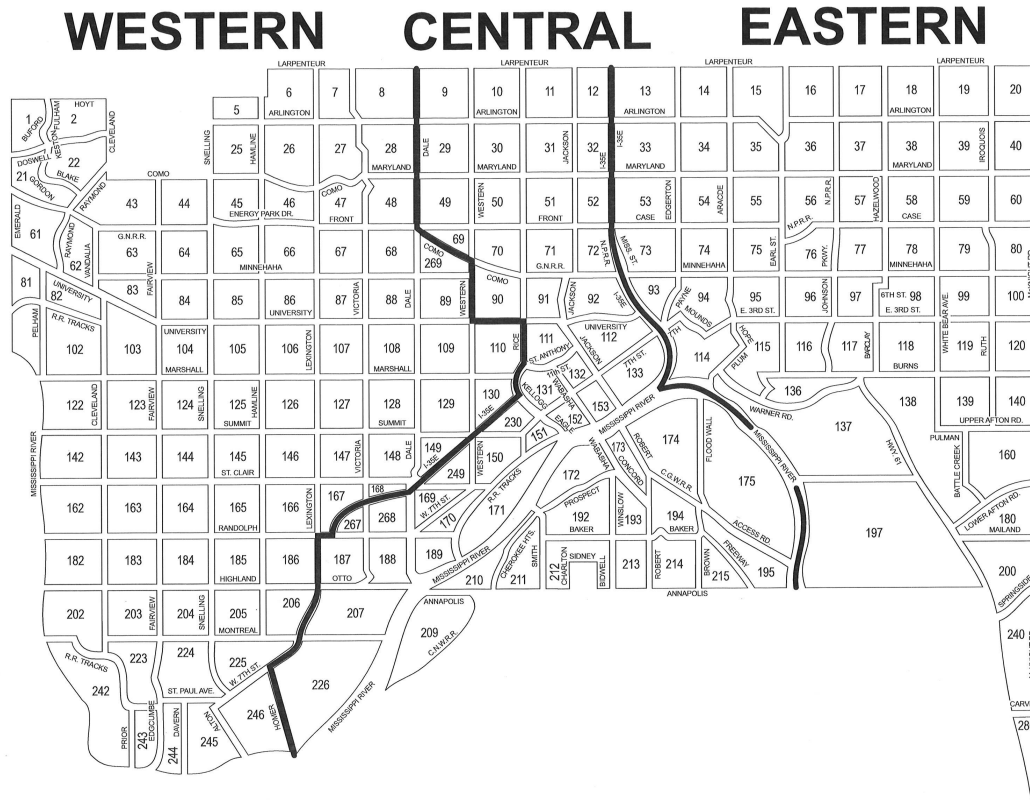


Figure 2: U.S. Census Tracts

